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The Promotion of U.S. Latino Films

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The Promotion of U.S. Latino Films

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2004

Dedication

To my mother Rosa and my father Henry O. Puente (1933-1999).

Acknowledgements

In order to complete a doctoral dissertation, a person often receives a great deal of moral and emotional support. That being the case, I would not have made it to this point without the encouragement of my parents. Although my father is not physically here to witness this, he was the person who thought I should pursue a doctoral degree. On the other hand, my mother was a pillar of strength for me. I cannot thank her enough for her encouraging words throughout this long process. I also would like to thank my longtime friend Aric Eidadu for his words of wisdom and Jolene Fassbinder “my homie from Iowa” for constantly humor me and for taking long walks with me on the beach. Other important people who were instrumental on this journey were my good friends at University of Texas at Austin like Jane Park, Mark Cunningham, and Laura Ohata. Thanks for being my family away from home! In addition, I wanted to especially thank Laura for being such a great editor throughout graduate school. Without her keen eyes and astute knowledge of all the grammatical rules, I would have never completed this ambitious project.

In addition, I would like to thank my advisor Professor Tom Schatz, who was wearing many hats throughout this process, but always managed to give me excellent advice. I would also like to thank the rest of the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin for their support, especially a former faculty member John Downing (J.D.). Next, I would like to thank all the busy individuals like Santiago Pozo, Danny Haro, and Ivette Rodriguez, who allowed me to interview them. Without their support, this study would not have been possible.

Lastly, I would be remissed if I did not thank some important people who influenced me a great deal in the earlier portions of my life, which often seems like a lifetime ago. My Chaffey College communication professor Kip Preble got me hooked into this subject with his love of teaching and the media. His enthusiasm for mass media and knowledge were contagious. My Gladstone High School wrestling coach William Marker, badminton coach Rick Brodbeck, and my judo sensei Gary Goltz taught me that hard work, dedication, and discipline did not just translate into athletic excellence. You can utilize these traits into everything that you try to accomplish in life and achieve things that you never thought were possible.

The Promotion of U.S. Latino Films

Publication No._____

Henry Puente, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2004

Supervisor: Thomas G. Schatz

This study describes how distributors, publicists, film marketers, and producers of U.S. Latino films have attempted to target this growing and elusive niche market from the early 1980s to the 21st century. Through the utilization of case studies and periodization, my study analyzes how the specific marketplace structure of that precise period of time affected the promotion and distribution of significant U.S. Latino films, such as *Zoot Suit* (1981), *La Bamba* (1987), *My Family/Mi Familia* (1995), *Selena* (1997) and *Spy Kids* (2001).

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Chapter 1: The Promotion and Distribution of U.S. Latino films

This dissertation examines how independent and studio marketers have promoted U.S. Latino films to both U.S. Latinos and general audiences over the past twenty years. I center my analysis on the marketing and distribution sectors of the motion picture industry because U.S. Latino films, though still rare, are beginning to appear more frequently in independent, specialty, and studio distributors pipeline of motion pictures. Especially in the last 20 years, the Hollywood studios, as well as art film and independent distributors, have done a much better job of developing, producing, and acquiring U.S. Latino films. This trend is evident by the sheer number of U.S. Latino motion pictures that have appeared in theaters in the past few years. In fact, in 2002 and 2003, various distributors premiered about a dozen U.S. Latino films like *Spy Kids 2* (2002), a figure that nearly exceeds the total number of Latino film projects that were distributed throughout the 1980s.

The issue of marketing becomes especially relevant when one considers the primary characteristic of the New Hollywood and its efforts to target diverse audiences through its control of media production and distribution outlets such as film studios, television and cable networks, home video stores, and various print mediums. Generally, Hollywood studios strive to create "a marketing synergy," using various media channels to promote two basic types of films. First, Hollywood studios tend to develop and market blockbuster or "high concept" films, from *Jaws* (1975) to *Spiderman* (2002), to attract diverse audiences to theaters in the United States and in foreign markets. The domestic theatrical box office of blockbuster films represent not only their initial revenue stream,

so vital to the economic well-being of today's entertainment conglomerate, but also act as a springboard for other more lucrative ancillary markets like foreign distribution, video, DVD, pay-per-view, cable and network television licensing. Secondary markets eventually determine whether or not a film becomes a potentially lucrative franchise or a costly failure.

In addition to blockbuster films, the second type of film that Hollywood distributes is the niche market motion picture. Hollywood distributors typically diversify their production slates by developing or acquiring specialty films that target specific market segments of moviegoers who often prefer non-mainstream films. These lucrative niche markets can be determined by identifiable demographic criteria like age, ethnicity, and gender. Examples of these lucrative niche markets include Black-themed "gangsta" films (*New Jack City* [1991]) or hip-hop films (The House Party franchise [1990, 1991, and 1994]), teen films (*I Know What You Did Last Summer* [1997]), kids/pre-teen/family films (*Lion King* [1994]), gay/lesbian films (*Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert* [1994]), "yuppie" films (*Fatal Attraction* [1987]), female films (*Legally Blonde* [2001]), films for older moviegoers (*Space Cowboys* [2000]), foreign films (*Crouching Tiger and Hidden Dragon* [2000]), and Spanish-language films (*Como Aqua para Chocolate)* (*Like Water for Chocolate* [1992]). Niche markets films have been important vehicles for Hollywood distributors, because they are often low-budget projects that have the potential to become quite profitable if marketed correctly.

While the New Hollywood has been successful in targeting certain niche markets like U.S. Blacks, this marketing synergy has not always performed well with U.S. Latino

films. Superficially, Latinos would appear to be the ideal audience. Latinos represent the fastest growing ethnic group among U.S. film audiences. Every year, since 1995, this ethnic group has outspent Blacks at the box office. Furthermore, the English-speaking portion of this ethnic group tends to be a particularly heavy movie-going audience, generally attending movies more often than Anglos. More importantly, in an era where buying power and niche marketing have become extremely important to mainstream advertisers, the population and purchasing strength of Latinos have skyrocketed. According to Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia, between 1990 to 2002, Latino buying power increased by 118% to $452.4 billion. Simultaneously, U.S. Latino population has grown 58% to 35 million. In spite of positive changes within the U.S. Latino community and a surge in the number of Latino films, recent motion pictures like *Raising Victor Vargas* (2002) and *Girlfight* (2002) generally have not benefited from expanding target audience.

Over the past two decades, U.S. Latino films have encountered several barriers to success. Some of the earlier U.S. Latino films had a difficult time being acquired by either a large studio or a large independent distributor. Over time, as more U.S. Latino films were acquired by either a studio or specialty division, distributors may not have spent an identical amount of money on advertising their Latino product that they would have spent on general market films, since they primarily focused only on Spanish-language marketing. This study analyzes how U.S. Latino film projects have been promoted and distributed over the past 23 years as well as tracing the concurrent social and industrial factors within the U.S. Latino community and the larger Hollywood

marketplace. More importantly, this dissertation represents one of the first academic works that actually describes and analyzes how U.S. Latino films have been promoted and distributed in the past two decades.

Literature Review

My literature review primarily concentrates on three specific academic areas of study: Chicano/Latino cinema, cultural studies centering on hybrid texts like U.S. Latino film, and political economy that examines the evolving market structure of the New Hollywood over the past two decades. Besides providing an academic background for my dissertation, my literature review attempts to bridge the academic gap between Chicano film scholarship, cultural studies, and New Hollywood literature. Simultaneously, I illustrate a glaring research void within both Chicano film literature and New Hollywood scholarship. Chicano film scholars have done little in terms of studying the marketing and distribution of U.S. Latino films within the current Hollywood market structure; meanwhile New Hollywood scholarship has generally focused on high-budget films that drive studio production and subsequent ancillary markets and typically has ignored art films or ethnic-oriented films.

My dissertation begins where Chon Noriega's *Shot in America* and David Rosen with Peter Hamilton's *Off-Hollywood: The Making & Marketing of Independent Films* conclude their books. Noriega wraps up this book by contending that independent Latino filmmakers and producers are encountering more obstacles in distributing films within an increasingly global marketplace [1, p. 194]. He also traces three periods of Chicano cinema beginning with media activism (1968-1977). The second phase commences with

a growing number of Chicano filmmakers that receive non-commercial funding in order to produce films (1974-1984). This eventually leads us to the final stage which is the introduction of Chicano cinema into U.S. theaters (1981- Present) [1, p. 25]. David Rosen and Peter Hamilton's *Off-Hollywood: The Making & Marketing of Independent Films* (1990) cites several economic, social, and political factors that led to the success of independent films throughout the 1980s -- notably the greater demand for visual entertainment driven by a growth of media outlets; the assumption that investing in motion pictures could be lucrative under Reaganomics; and the maturation of the baby boomer generation, a traditionally heavy movie-going population, which increased the potential pool of viewers [2, p. 261]. *Off-Hollywood* illustrates the importance of advertising and properly distributing a motion picture, facets of the business which are often overlooked within Chicano film history.

a) **New Hollywood Literature**

New Hollywood literature is important to my study, because it charts the major changes that have occurred in the motion picture industry during the past 23 years. More specifically, I illustrate how the changing marketplace has affected the distribution and marketing of U.S. Latino films. I contend that these motion pictures are heavily influenced by changes within the general marketplace, because many of these motion pictures are developed and produced outside the Hollywood system. For example, when many independent distributors went out of business in the late 1980s, this had a huge influence on U.S. Latino films like *Break of Dawn* (1988), which could not secure a good distribution deal. As a result, a U.S. Latino film's dependency on being acquired by a

larger studio or art film distributor escalated over time as the number of distributors diminished. Furthermore, U.S. Latino films are directly impacted when marketing budgets skyrocket.

Despite the increasing importance of motion picture marketing and distribution, these two facets of the film industry are generally understudied. There are even fewer studies that focus on how film marketers promote ethnic films and target these moviegoers. Allen and Gomery point out a few reasons why the distribution portion of this industry is difficult to study. These two authors claim that academic institutions ignore distribution and focus on the artistic or the aesthetic side of motion pictures [3, p. 133]. Studios also have not been forthcoming with this financial information. Gomery and Allen go as far as stating that studios would burn or bury this information [3, p. 133]. With the lack of marketing and distribution information available to scholars, it is not surprising that academics who study the New Hollywood primarily examine the four following themes: 1) How the promotion of a single motion picture triggered new marketing and distribution strategies; 2) American independent films; 3) Blockbuster or high concept films; 4) Unfair business practices like vertical integration or subtle collaboration among the studios.

Some scholars describe how a single film like *Jaws* or *Star Wars* altered marketing and distribution philosophies in the New Hollywood. Thomas Schatz (1993 & 1997) cites how *Jaws* helped to alter Hollywood's traditional belief that blockbusters had to be released during the holiday season by proving that a summer film could be extremely lucrative. In addition, he stresses the importance of the film's media campaign

that included a huge television advertising blitz [4, p. 18, 5, p. 80]. Furthermore, the distributor of *Jaws* implemented a "front-loading" technique where it released the film widely during its first week to reduce the effect of negative reviews [4, p. 19].

Olen Earnest (1985) and Gary Hoppenstand (1998) examine the marketing of *Star Wars* (1977). Earnest explains that the pre-release marketing campaign was extremely detailed and well-planned, which allowed studio marketers to effectively identify and develop the film's target audience – people under the age of 25 [6, p. 11]. He believes that the best decision by Twentieth Century Fox's marketing team was to release the film in May instead of June, which tends to be highly competitive [6, p. 12]. This strategy allowed marketers to focus on young moviegoers throughout the summer when most were out of school as well as expanding its scope to moviegoers over the age of 35 [6, p. 17]. Earnest cites how the plan and an extraordinary word-of-mouth made *Stars Wars* one of the biggest blockbusters in American film history [6, p. 18]. Similar to Earnest, Hoppenstand describes *Star Wars'* sophisticated marketing approach as a "Film Environment," which would be a template for contemporary promotional plans. These marketers skillfully built up anticipation among moviegoers through the novelization of the film, the limited release, and by developing a line of toys [7, p. 234-235].

Tiiu Lukk's *Movie Marketing: Opening the Picture and Giving It Legs* and Harold Vogel's *Entertainment Industry Economics: A Guide for Financial Analysis* examine elements that influence how a motion picture is promoted. Lukk provides the reader with several examples of how movie marketers developed and implemented promotional strategies for various films ranging from studio films to documentaries.

Lukk contends that there are three different distributors in the current marketplace that target different audiences, which often dictate marketing approaches: 1) major distributors - mainstream films; 2) specialty distributors – niche market or urban audiences; 3) B-movie distributors – low-budget, independent films [8, p. xi]. Vogel analyzes how demographic and marketplace changes have shaped the American film industry. He contends that demographic shifts alter marketing campaigns, since distributors center their publicity plans with a certain target audience in mind [9, p. 84].

The next part of the New Hollywood that is often studied by film scholars is the independent film market. Two books were written about this subject: Emanual Levy's *Cinema of Outsiders: The Rise of American Independent Film* and Greg Merritt's *Celluloid Mavericks: the History of American Independent Film*. Similar to Hamilton and Rosen's Off-Hollywood book, Levy cites several factors that led to the emergence of American independent cinema. In addition, Levy dedicates a chapter on multicultural cinema, "defined by filmmakers of diverse racial backgrounds" [10, p. 315]. Levy asserts that Hollywood distributors typically have had trouble producing films for this ethnic group, for instance, *Bound by Honor* (1993). But recently, some niche market distributors like New Line Cinema have been able to successfully distribute motion pictures such as *My Family/Mi Familia* (1995) [10, p. 316]. In the meantime, Merritt examines the 100-year history of American independent films. He does dedicate a small portion of the book to the arrival of U.S. Latino films like Gregory Nava's *El Norte* (1983) and Ramon Menendez's *Stand and Deliver* (1988) in the 1980s [11, p. 320]. In addition, he points out the emergence of director Robert Rodriguez, who uses low-budget

El Mariachi (1992) as a springboard to direct more mainstream fare such as, *Desperado* (1995), *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996), and *The Faculty* (1998) [11, p. 370]. Merritt concludes his book by describing how independent films of the 1990s change from relatively low-budget films with modest profit potential to big business after the acquisition of both New Line Cinema by Warner Bros. and Miramax and Disney, because an independent film could now possibly make $100 million [11, p. 353-354].

Tino Balio studies how the art film market changed in the past decade. He describes how Miramax, Fine Line, and Samuel Goldwyn emerged as the three strongest art film distributors after many independents went out of business in the late 1980s [12, p. 66]. The success of these distributors convinced entertainment conglomerates like Disney and Turner Broadcasting to once again enter the art film business. This began a wave of consolidation, as Hollywood studios purchased specialty divisions or developed their own classics divisions to provide an alternative to their mainstream films [12, p. 64]. This trend within the distribution industry made it tougher for independents to succeed, especially if they needed access to screens in the expensive New York City market in order to get a simple review from the important *New York Times* [12, p. 65]. Small, independent film distributors increasingly had a difficult time competing with these studio-affiliated specialty distributors for screens and for reviews.

Justin Wyatt completes a case study on two art film stalwarts – New Line Cinema and Miramax – from their origins to their status as mini-majors. Jim Cones (1992) defines a mini-major as a second-tier film producer or distributor [13p. 303] . Within this definition, he states that some analysts also cite the lack of a production facility [13, p.

303]. Wyatt contends that the primary reason why these distributors succeeded was their ability to produce films that were able to crossover from art film audiences to mainstream [14, p. 76]. He cites Miramax's savvy publicity campaigns that range from challenging the MPAA rating system to selling a "secret" on *The Crying Game* (1992) [14, p. 80]. These two distributors became "hybrids" with some characteristics of an independent distributor, but with the ability to invest a great deal of money on a promotional campaign [14, p. 87]. Wyatt concludes that these two distributors have turned the art film market into something of a duopoly [14, p. 87].

Other scholars analyze the importance of "high-concept" films to the New Hollywood market structure. Scholars like Suzanne Mary Donahue and David Garvin examine the factors that led to the production of big budget films in the New Hollywood market structure. Donahue emphasizes that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, studios began to produce high-budget films that appealed to a wide audience and shift away from mid-budget films [15, p. 13, 16, p. 193]. Both scholars stress that Hollywood majors could no longer produce films that only appealed to limited audiences, because motion picture production and distribution became too expensive [15, 16, p. 35]. In spite of the importance of high-budget films to the studios, they believed that art film distributors were also invaluable subsidiaries to studios, because they produce inexpensive films that have a loyal audience [15, p. 13, 16, p. 35].

Wyatt (1994) defines high-concept films, as a motion picture that has an easily understood narrative and is highly marketable to the public [17, p. 8]. Nevertheless, Wyatt argues that high concept films do intertwine product differentiation with market

segmentation, forming a marketplace that can be broken into several niche markets with the aim of meeting the demands of specific consumers prior to crossing over to a broader audience [17, p. 100-101]. Maltby also describes high concept films as the generative mechanisms that drive New Hollywood's engine. He stresses that the New Hollywood has become quite efficient, because it "understands its economics, its audiences and its products in dramatically different ways" by being able to target them more effectively [18, p. 23]. In the New Hollywood, the studios have evolved into financiers and distributors who have adjusted to the fragmentation of the audience, have cultivated demographics and target audiences via "market research," and have developed new global markets and delivery systems [18, p. 23]. He emphasizes that major Hollywood corporations are now heavily invested in ancillary revenues and popular culture items like books, television shows, videos, T-shirts, magazines, tie-ins and merchandising arrangements with advertisers [18, p. 26].

Barry Litman and Anne M. Hoag (1998) examine the various strategies that the exhibition industry experimented with in order to remain a viable revenue stream, especially in an era where the growth of television and home video has skyrocketed [19, p. 100-101]. During the 1980s and 1990s, three market trends centering on the exhibition industry took place: 1) concentration – the purchasing of many U.S. screens from 1983 to 1988; 2) vertical integration – studios acquiring exhibition theaters; 3) diversification – pursuit of other businesses not related to entertainment [19, p. 101-103, 105]. These plans generally have been ineffective strategies for exhibitors [19, p. 105].

Both Thomas Guback (1987) and Tino Balio (1998) examine the vertical integration of the motion picture that took place in the 1980s. Guback recounts several acquisitions that took place like Paramount buying the 350-screen Mann Theater chain [20, p. 72]. In addition, he states reasons a distributor would benefit from owning theaters. For example, they can control ticket prices, not sharing revenue with the exhibitor, and more control over the release of their films [20, p. 73-74]. On the other hand, Balio emphasizes that it was Hollywood's faith in synergy that led to several mergers [21, p. 61]. He also argues that entertainment companies took different approaches in this era. For instance, Paramount and Warner Communications downsized operations in order to become more efficient [21, p. 62]. In contrast, Sony became much larger when it purchased Columbia Pictures Entertainment [21, p. 63]. Other companies like Disney and Turner Broadcasting attempted to diversify their film products by acquiring art film distributors Miramax and New Line Cinema [21, p. 66]. Ultimately, these entertainment companies merged with the intent of taking advantage of the global marketplace [21, p. 70].

Janet Wasko (1995), Robert McChesney (2000), Kerry Segrave (1997), and Asu Aksoy and Kevin Robbins (1992) examine how the oliogopistic business practices of these large motion picture companies allow a handful of studios to remain in control of the industry. Wasko refutes the notions of those individuals who predicted that new technology of the 1970s and 1980s would create more diverse programming and competition for large companies [22, p. 249]. She asserts that only large companies have the resources to fully exploit new technologies [22, p. 249]. As a result, the identical five

or six Hollywood film distributors still collect 90% of film rentals and largely control ancillary markets like home video and cable [22, p. 249]. In addition, McChesney points out that only 16 out of a possible 148 films that were widely distributed (600 screens or more) in 1997 came from outside the studios [23, p. 19]. Of these 16 films, many of them secured distribution deals with one of these Hollywood giants. This evolving structure resulted in a marketplace that is nearly void of truly independent distributors, foreign films, and single-screen theaters [23, p. 33-34]. Similar to McChesney, Aksoy and Robins contend that studio control of distribution and finance are primary factors in how these companies make it difficult for smaller companies to compete effectively [24, p. 15-16]. The trend towards media conglomeration allowed these entertainment giants to develop a wide array of revenue streams that reach throughout the industry, but the essential piece to a mega-company remains studio ownership [24, p. 17]. Lastly, Segrave cites how Hollywood studios have been able to control the art film market. He contends that Hollywood's domination of the art film market allows them to select only the best independent films for global distribution. He believes that this could be a strategy by the Hollywood giants to further reduce competition from more efficient but under funded independent distributors [25, p. 245-246].

Douglas Gomery (2000) analyzes how the Hollywood studios remain a closely-knit oligopoly of six: Disney, Paramount (owned by Viacom), Sony Pictures (formerly Columbia), Twentieth Century Fox (owned by News Corp.), Universal Pictures (then owned by Seagram, now by GE/NBC), and Warner Bros. (owned by Time Warner) [26, p. 360]. He asserts that these studios compete to produce and release films that will

produce high box office grosses, but they also quietly collaborate make certain that an outside distributor does not produce the same of film [26, p. 360]. Simultaneously, these companies have become quite adept at developing and releasing alternative films. Gomery credits Michael Eisner as the individual who was responsible for providing Disney a new niche after it purchased Miramax. The success of Miramax began a studio trend of acquiring art film divisions [26, p. 384]. He ultimately describes the New Hollywood as a group of companies that have the ability to cultivate diverse audiences through their control of multiple media outlets.

New Hollywood scholarship along with trade press articles from *Variety* reporters like Leonard Klady provide my dissertation with a valuable analysis centering on distribution, marketing and exhibition trends within the motion picture industry. Although their analyses are normally limited to studio films or major distributors, they still did identify barriers to entry that many independent distributors encountered in the New Hollywood. In addition, they point out how studio film marketing often overwhelms the less visible publicity campaigns of independent distributors. Trade articles from *Variety* were also extremely useful in describing various distribution trends that often changed from one year to the next. Occasionally, a reporter from a trade publication would conduct a three-year analysis of studio market shares, which tracks how many films are produced and distributed as well as the revenue generated by these films. Given the industry's volatility and the fact that the studios also provided much of this information, these analyses can be construed to be troublesome at times, especially if these writers speculate on future trends. The New Hollywood literature and the trade

press writers were often quite illuminating in how the market structure evolved over the past 20 years and the direct impact it had on niche market products.

B) **Chicano & Latino film scholarship**

Since the study of Chicano films is a relatively new academic field, many scholars are still attempting to identify specific periods within U.S. Latino film history. Similar to Chon Noriega's previously mentioned book *Shot in America*, Tomas Ybarra Frausto's 1990 article entitled *The Chicano alternative film movement* also contends that the Chicano alternative film movement had three overlapping phases [27, p. 45]. However, his three periods are a little different than Noriega. His first period (1965-1970) began when Cesar Chavez led a walkout of farm workers and cinematic work that encapsulated the period was Teatro Campesino's animated slide show of Corky Gonzalez' poem *I Am Joaquin* (*Yo Soy Joaquin*). The next period (early 1970s- early 1980s) commences when Chicano movement artists create community-based centers and began to develop manifestos that would describe a Chicano aesthetic. In a period dominated by documentaries, a significant film, *Racies de Sangre* (1978) was produced by the Mexican film industry. The most relevant film of the final period was *Zoot Suit* (1981), which signaled Hollywood's potential acceptance of Chicano films as well as a possible opening for more future Chicano films [27, p. 46-47].

Ramirez-Berg, similar to both Noriega and Frausto, argues that there have been three waves of Chicano cinema. The first wave (1969-1976) included many documentaries. Generally, the tone of documentaries were often "politically contestational and formally oppositional" to Hollywood cinema [28, p. 185]. These

documentarians had several goals in mind. Some of these objectives were to educate Chicanos, instill ethnic pride, and to give this ethnic group a voice [28, p. 186]. Some of the filmmakers from the initial wave have joined the second wave of Chicano cinema (1977-Present Day). This period included many documentaries, docudramas such as *Alambrista,* and some feature films like *Zoot Suit* [28, p. 186]. Ramirez-Berg argues that Chicano cinema is currently in the midst of its 3rd wave of filmmaking that actually began in the late 1980s. These filmmakers tend to produce Hollywood genre films that subtly embed political content within their motion pictures unlike the previous two waves [28, p. 187].

In one of the few essays that addresses the marketing problems that Chicano films encounter in the New Hollywood, Chon Noriega (1992) points out that Chicano filmmakers produced only nine feature films in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, and did not receive much attention from the mainstream media. He argues that studios fail to effectively promote these motion pictures because they do not implement the grassroots marketing plans that ethnic films require [29, p. 147]. These promotional strategies are necessary, since mass campaigns that utilize television trailers are primarily ineffective due to simple stereotypes that alienate the motion picture's potential audience. For example, Noriega asserts that advertising trailers gave moviegoers the impression that *Zoot Suit* was a gang film and *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982) was a macho western [29, p. 147]. Lastly, Noriega argues that the distribution of Chicano cinema is just as important as the "significance" and the "production" of Chicano cinema, since the

effectiveness of distribution campaigns will determine whether or not they are seen and what theater locations are secured [29, p. 152].

Going one step further than Noreiga, David Rosen (1992) actually examines how *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez, El Norte,* and *Stand and Deliver* were marketed by their respective distributors [30, p. 241]. He describes the two target audiences for these films – 1) art film audiences; 2) the group that is depicted by the film's subject matter [30, p. 245-246]. He also explains how each of these films benefited from a PBS distribution deal [30, p. 251]. Rosen cites that there is a considerable risk in independent filmmaking such as the film may never be seen by its target audience [30, p. 251]. Rosen asserts that these U.S. Latino films require a great deal of imagination and effort by the filmmaker and distributor to ensure a substantial audience and financial success [30, p. 251].

Jesus Salvador Trevino (1985) cites a growing Latino audience in the early 1980s as the primary reason why Hollywood produced U.S. Latino motion pictures or border films, such as *Boulevard Nights* (1979), *Walk Proud* (1979), *Borderline* (1980), and *The Border* (1982) [31, p. 109]. Since this is a new type of film being produced, the acceptance of the audience at the box office and investors' willingness to financially support these films will determine the dominant form of U.S. Latino films [31, p. 114]. This undetermined form represents a double-edged sword for Trevino, because these types of films could follow the same path of Mexican films where its producers develop lowest common denominator films that do not resonate with its target audience. In contrast, this cinema's unfixed characteristics may actually result in cultivating an audience beyond English-speaking Latinos [31, p. 114].

Several scholars - Coco Fusco, Chon Noriega, and Gary Keller - focus on a two-year period from 1987 to 1988 that is commonly referred to as the Hispanic Hollywood. The Hispanic Hollywood suggests that there will be increase in the number of Hispanic films, directors and stars [32]. First, Fusco stresses that motion pictures like *La Bamba* (1987), *Born in East LA* (1987), and *Stand and Deliver* began a trend where studios distributed U.S. Latino films in both English and Spanish [33]. *La Bamba* was especially vital for the U.S. Latino community, because this motion picture illustrated the box office potential of this ethnic group, when targeted effectively [33]. However, distributors have limited the box office potential of U.S. Latino films like *El Norte*, because these films often only receive limited distribution [33]. On the other hand, Noriega studied how U.S. Latino films like *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1988), *La Bamba*, and *Born in East LA* were reviewed by various publications, concluding that the mainstream press tends to ignore these motion pictures [32]. Similar to Noriega, Keller points out that the Hispanic Hollywood became a hot term among many mainstream magazines that celebrated this growing niche market and Latinos' frequent movie going habits [34, p. 163]. Keller also stresses the success of Columbia Pictures' marketing and distribution plan in attracting a high number of Latino moviegoers to *La Bamba* [34, p. 165].

Analogous to the film articles above that "periodize" Chicano film, Ana M. Lopez splits Cuban filmmakers into three different generations that seems to be determined by age. Lopez describes the first generation filmmakers as producing motion pictures like *El Super* (1979) or documentaries that have "explicit anti-revoluntary politics" [35, p. 44]. The second-generation filmmakers are more acculturated, because they are trained in the

United States. These films like *Crossover Dreams* (1985) tend to focus on less political dialog and emphasize how Cubans are adapting to life in the U.S. [35, p. 47]. The third-generation Cuban American filmmakers are an interesting combination of being more assimilated, but less interested in producing highly marketable films [35, p. 50]. They appear to be going through retro-acculturation (or trying to regain their native culture) by trying to reconnect with Cuba [35, p. 43].

Lastly, related to Chicano film, but extremely understudied, is the emergence of Puerto Rican film in New York City. Lillian Jimenez provides a brief history that centers on the emergence of Puerto Rican filmmakers and video makers in New York City. She cites the importance of a local series *Realidades* and how this television program would provide an important training ground for future Puerto Rican independent filmmakers. The article describes the huge institutional and financial obstacles that documentarians like Carlos de Jesus encountered to just complete their projects [36, p. 27]. However, the author contends that it was important for these filmmakers to complete these projects, because it provided the community with a voice and placed this ethnic group in the center instead of being relegated to the margins. Lastly, Jimenez writes that Puerto Ricans need to continue to produce films that celebrate their mixed cultural backgrounds and motion pictures utilize their popular culture in order to develop new forms of resistance [36, p. 36-37].

c) **Cultural Studies**

Since a motion picture is not produced and consumed in a vacuum, cultural studies cannot be disregarded when analyzing the production, distribution, and exhibition

of U.S. Latino films. Cultural Studies emerged out of the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies to focus on the "interrelationship between representations and ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality in cultural texts" [37, p. 6]. This area of study also analyzes how subcultures or ethnic groups either resist or subvert dominant forms of culture, such as mass media, to create their own particular style -- in this case U.S. Latino films [37, p. 6].

Jesus Martin-Barbero refers to the interrelationship between various ideologies, races, ethnicities, and nationalities within a culture as a “cultural circulation” [38, p. 99]. He insists that three different environmental influences form a neighborhood culture: agencies formed outside the neighborhood, such as schools; agencies formed outside the neighborhood but still rooted in the neighborhood like cafes; and agencies formed by the popular classes like libraries [38, p. 197]. Despite the influence of these outside agencies, the most powerful individuals of these cultures are “the mediators” – political activists, who often introduce and provide a vital link between this particular culture and mainstream society [38, p. 197]. I argue that early Chicano filmmakers were the political activists who introduced U.S. society to this ethnic group’s plight and history.

Other significant scholars that examine hybrid cultures and texts similar to U.S. Latino films that emerge from this intermixing of cultures are Marwan Kraidy and Nestor Garcia Canclini. Kraidy (1999) argues that diverse countries, such as the United States, need to recognize that cultural hybridity is often “a rule as opposed to the exception” [39, p. 472]. Kraidy examines how hybrid cultures subvert media messages in order for them to resonate with their local or regional community [39, p. 460]. Kraidy defines the

mixing of local, regional, and global messages as “glocalization” [39, p. 472]. She asserts that it is becoming more difficult to distinguish the difference between local and global [39, p. 459]. Kraidy also asserts that joining hybridity with hegemonic scholars will be positive step towards merging the gap between political economy and cultural studies [39, p. 472].

Canclini (1992) argues that a great deal of deterritorialization, a migration of large numbers of people from poor countries to rich countries, created new cultural flows and allowed for a great deal of mixing between traditional local cultures with “modern or postmodern media” [40, p. 39]. Within these new hybrid cultures or territories, the dominant culture can no longer rely on the mass media as a means to assimilate everyone into one monolithic culture. Instead, he claims that the mass media now encourages new techniques of segmentation by disseminating diverse information to a broad audience [40, p. 34]. This intermixing between local cultures and media technology resulted in U.S. Latino films like *La Bamba* and *Zoot Suit* [40, p. 39]. Canclini ultimately believes that researchers should not be limited to studying the inequalities between producer and consumer from the top down, but from many other complex cultural and economic factors [40, p. 34].

John Fiske (1997) discusses the difficulty of targeting and marketing to specific audiences, especially for large corporations that are not familiar with these local cultures. In this current post-Fordist era, cultural producers attempt to target multiple, diverse, and specific niche markets [41, p. 58]. As a result, Fiske argues that these producers are creating a cultural hierarchy with a few prominent products being produced at the

expense of other cultural products that may not be perceived as lucrative [41, p. 65]. Simultaneously, cultural producers continue to produce goods that appeal to this specific "interlocal" culture with the intent of discovering what may also crossover and appeal to a broader audience. However, this venture is often quite risky for the producer, because he cannot determine which products will become successful [41, p. 66]. He ultimately stresses that "interlocal" cultures could become a place where diverse voices are targeted by commercial and non-profit media outlets or these voices could get muted within this cultural mix [41, p. 66].

Theoretical Framework

Through the integration of political economy analysis that examines the New Hollywood, cultural studies that centers primarily on cultural hybridity, and Chicano/U.S. Latino film scholarship, my dissertation examines how U.S. Latino films were advertised and distributed to Latino and mainstream audiences. These three lines of scholarly inquiry respond to Douglas Kellner's challenge to present media scholars and researchers to overcome the gap between cultural studies and political economy and attempts to address culture from a political economy perspective [42, p. 117]. Kellner asserts that scholars need to develop a "more transdisciplinary approach" [42, p. 103]. He claims that media academics and researchers have created a huge divide without acknowledging how essential both disciplines are to studying the media, which ultimately lends itself to overemphasizing reception or dominant ideology. To enrich my argument, I use Kellner's suggestion to "situate analysis of cultural texts within their system of production and distribution, often referred to as the political economy of culture" [42, p. 104]. He

insists that a political economy approach does not solely "read these films as examples of capitalist or ruling class ideology," but takes into account multiple perspectives [42, p. 111]. In this particular case, I am utilizing a Chicano's perspective to understand how U.S. Latino films were distributed and marketed to mainstream and Latino audiences within the New Hollywood structure.

Though Kellner may disagree with beginning my study from a political economy point of view, I claim that a media scholar needs to acknowledge the significance of both economics and culture within the New Hollywood structure. I ultimately intend to stress within my theoretical framework the interrelationship between both of these elements. I will begin with Douglas Gomery and other political economy scholars who contend that it is best to study media by first placing economics at the center of study. Gomery (1993) contends that economics needs to become a focal point of media study, but that scholars also need to implement flexible methods to address core concerns [43, p. 190]. He also asserts that media scholars should not restrict media economics to a limited range of media institutions, because it can become an essential tool to evaluate the current media structure as well as the future of the media [43, p. 191]. Gomery maintains that if media economists integrate the analysis of market structure, conduct, and performance into a practical tool, they will discover that this methodological instrument will be able to sort and address difficult policy questions, such as issues of diversity, minority rights, and cultural identity [43, p. 197].

I will implement Barry Litman and Douglas Gomery's industrial organizational model (market structure, market conduct, market performance) to study the Latino

market within the New Hollywood. Litman (1998) describes market structure as the ways in which institutional forces, such as market concentration, barriers to entry, and product differentiation, shape a specific industry [7, p. 266]. Within my dissertation, I describe these various institutional forces and how they affected the production and distribution of alternative film product like U.S. Latino films. Furthermore, I believe that U.S. Latino films fit in nicely with Gomery's definition of product differentiation. He defines product differentiation as the production of different types of films in order to make a your movie more attractive to an audience than your competitor's motion picture [44, p. 54]. Next, I analyze the market conduct of these various Hollywood and independent distributors as they implement various marketing strategies in their efforts to develop a promotional template for U.S. Latino films. Litman defines market conduct as the way in which different competitors react to one another in a specific industry [7, p. 282]. For example, throughout my dissertation, I describe instances where a marketer employed a successful promotional plan that attracted Latino audiences. The success of this marketing strategy resulted in competitors also applying similar promotional strategies, especially in the late 1980s. My dissertation primarily focuses on market performance in terms of how efficient these film marketers were in attracting Latino audiences. Although this marketing data may not exist, the efficiency of a motion picture's marketing strategy could be determined by discovering the percentage of Latino moviegoers and comparing it how much money these marketers spent on promoting these particular motion pictures. Gomery cites efficiency as one component of market performance [44, p. 56].

I intend to illustrate that the industrial organization model can be an effective tool when analyzing less visible changes within the motion picture industry, such as a studios' marketing and distribution of niche films. To my knowledge, media scholars have implemented this theoretical framework only when studying media mergers or the effects of high-budget, blockbuster films. Michael Wirth and Harry Bloch argue that industrial organizational theory has not been enhanced by empirical studies of such phenomena like program diversity in television and vertical integration in media industries [45, p. 23]. These scholars contend that this theoretical approach should be an essential component to answering media economic research questions. These two scholars provide examples of previous media economic studies and make recommendations on how this model could have enhanced the effectiveness of these previous analyses [45, p. 15-16]. Wirth and Bloch conclude that the industrial organization model will continue to be a viable theoretical framework as long as scholars broadened it with new types of studies [45, p. 24].

I propose to supplement my industrial analysis with primary research, including personal interviews, articles from entertainment publications and newspapers, and when possible the distributor's marketing information. Georg O. Ramstad (1997) contends that the industrial organizational model combined with primary historical data can be an effective means to look at a market at a specific period of time, and can provide the analyst with the ability to make predictions on how the market will develop in the future [46, p. 46]. Ramstad's theoretical model appears to be an improvement over Litman's and Gomery's industrial organizational model, because the inclusion of primary data provides

a more complete picture of the motion picture industry beyond an economic driven perspective. I assert that the weakness of the industrial organizational model continues be a problem that is not fully addressed by Ramstad, who points out that the audiences of a cultural product are not included directly. Cultural consumers are only referred to indirectly at the performance component stage such as box office figures. Ramstad acknowledges this theoretical model's glaring weakness by citing Picard, who asserts that the media industry is a dual product market which can be split into two groups: consumers and advertisers [46, p. 48]. Picard argues that both of these groups directly affect a media company's market performance and indirectly affect media conduct. Despite the many strengths of this theoretical framework, the industrial organizational model does not allow scholars to analyze companies' strategies for cultivating audiences, since a researcher can only deduce a company's plan in the market conduct portion of this method [46, p. 50].

Consequently, I plan to apply Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery's notion of generative mechanisms of an historic event, because Ramstad asserts that implementing historical data along with the industrial organizational model will provide a clearer picture of media studies. In terms of historical methodology, Robert Allen contends that the object of a historical study is not the actual historical event, but the generative (causal) mechanism of this event [3, p. 16]. He asserts that the generative mechanisms of an historical event are often several and never have equal effects on the incident [3, p. 16]. A generative mechanism is a social, political, or economic event that either drastically or subtly changes the structure of a marketplace. Since there are often many

generative mechanisms that can affect a structure at any particular point in time, a scholar should not attempt to isolate an event down to a single mechanism [3, p. 16]. I utilize Allen's four-step historical theoretical methodology by: 1) redescribing the historical events of Latino film marketing within a 20-year period in an effort to discover the generative mechanisms; 2) analyzing these causal mechanisms; 3) studying the interrelationships among these generative mechanisms; 4) assessing the force of these causal mechanisms [3, p. 215].

To build on Allen and Gomery's generative mechanism model, I incorporate periodization to identify specifically the industrial triggers that created changes within the Hollywood structure. Gomery (1998) contends that proper periodization is necessary, especially after the invention of sound [47, p. 47]. He argues "a more systematic and productive periodization" of Hollywood history begins with analyzing how the motion picture's business practices have evolved [47, p. 47]. Specifically, Gomery refers to how the studios have altered their traditional business models to adapt to the current market structure [47, p. 47]. He ultimately asserts that by understanding corporate strategies of the studio system, Hollywood historians can better understand how they continue to dominate the entertainment industry [47, p. 47]. This scholar contends that Hollywood is well equipped to exploit, cultivate, and expand multiple audiences through its control of various media [47, p. 53]. Though Gomery's theoretical model is useful to my study, he tends to overlook not only audiences but also lower budget films that emerge from outside the studio system, such as many U.S. Latino films. Consequently, this approach is ultimately ill equipped to examine how or why U.S. Latino films, whether distributed

in the Hollywood system or independently, fail to attract mainstream or Latino audiences. While Gomery's periodization model provides an important analytical framework for my dissertation, I will not take the top-down approach that Gomery utilizes when he analyzes Hollywood.

Instead, I will implement Mary Beth Haralovich's definition of periodization, which provides an alternative to Gomery's top-to-bottom approach and thus is more useful to this study. Haralovich (1986) defines periodization as "equilibrium between the synchronic and diachronic" [48, p. 5]. She argues that the importance of "micro-history" is necessary not only for understanding everyday life, but it must also be integrated into broader social processes [48, p. 6]. She states that periodization traditionally takes a top-down approach. In other words, many media scholars focus on the dominant culture at that particular time and overlook the non-mainstream culture. Haralovich's ultimate solution to this problem was to develop an "equilibrium between the micro-history and total culture" to get a better perspective of the "segments" within a given culture [48, p. 7]. Haralovich contends that the social makeup of society, at that specific moment in time, often influences the content of a film. She stresses, the importance of looking at a specific period as a total cultural system, including "conflict" and "resistance" [48, p. 7]. She also contends "that Allen and Gomery's conceptualization of social film history needs to be expanded by accentuating social institutions and social facts which lie outside of the immediate film industry" [48, p. 10].

I agree with Haralovich that, much too often, New Hollywood film scholars employ only a top-down approach, limiting their focus to the major studios and their

huge blockbuster films. In implementing Haralovich's bottom-up approach within my dissertation, I am simultaneously responding to Kellner's challenge to utilize a more transdisciplinary approach that addresses both cultural studies and political economy. I utilize a "bottom up" perspective by analyzing the motion picture industry from what is occurring at the independent or grass-roots level in terms of motion picture marketing. I attempt to get the often understudied perspective of marketers and distributors of ethnic-oriented films like U.S. Latino films. The majority of these motion pictures are independent films that rely on non-traditional means to promote these projects.

I agree with Fiske's claim that interlocal cultural products could get lost in the mix, particularly in the United States, a country with so much diversity. When it comes to high-budget studio films, mass audiences are needed to support these projects, the possibility of diverse cultures being not represented or depicted in the movies becomes a distinct possibility. At this particular point in time, because motion picture budgets are skyrocketing, box office figures have become increasingly important in the recreation of similar motion pictures and/or sequels. I consequently argue that U.S. Latino films are currently at a crossroads within this marketplace. I believe that these films could flourish as the Latino community grows in numbers and its culture becomes more accepted by mainstream audiences. On the other hand, if U.S. Latino films continue to be box office disappointments, these motion pictures could remain low priorities on Hollywood production slates.

My theoretical framework and analytical approaches attempt to bridge the gap between Chicano film scholarship and New Hollywood scholarship. Though Chicano

films scholars do indeed acknowledge the importance of marketing and distribution, no scholar has done a detailed study of how U.S. Latino films have been circulated within the prevailing market structure, particularly within the New Hollywood of the past two-decades, when this ethnic group became recognized as a viable niche market. This is troubling when we consider the vital importance that is placed on box office figures by Hollywood executives and how a successful theatrical run provides a springboard for the lucrative ancillary markets. Despite the fact that New Hollywood scholars have acknowledged how Hollywood produced different types of films to meet the demands of different audiences, these scholars have tended to focus on high-budget films and generally have ignored art films or ethnic-oriented films. I contend that my dissertation, through its use of cultural studies focusing on hybridity, will be a step toward bridging the breach between Chicano film literature and New Hollywood literature, since U.S. Latino films represent a cultural artifact that fuses both the dominant ideology of the Hollywood system and structure with the multicultural perspective of a Latino story being told by Latino talent.

Methodology

My dissertation analyzes how Hollywood studio distributors as well as art film and independent distributors have attempted to promote U.S. Latino films over the past two decades to the Latino market. Throughout this study, I examine studio, art film, and independent distributors' approaches to circulating U.S. Latino films as well as to how these strategies were influenced by the marketplace. Since many distributors do not provide me with access to primary research material like their marketing information, I

conduct lengthy personal or telephone interviews with the marketers, publicists, or producers, who were involved directly with the promotional decisions surrounding these motion pictures in order to compensate for this lack of information. These individuals primarily informed me of how they attempted to promote particular film projects to their target audiences. I also incorporate a great deal of secondary research material in my report. This secondary information often centers on marketing strategies, release dates, and box office figures. I gathered much of this information from various magazines, trade publications like *Variety*, Nielsen EDI, newspaper articles, and web sites such as www.IMDB.com.

Given that my dissertation describes how various distributors have attempted to target Latino audiences with U.S. Latino films, I must first define a U.S. Latino film. Chicano film scholars have not developed a contemporary definition for a U.S. Latino film. Jason C. Johansen simply describes these motion pictures as films by Chicanos, films for Chicanos, and films about Chicanos [49, p. 303]. Chon Noriega states that two significant elements of Chicano motion pictures are that they provide an alternative perspective to mainstream cinema and that they are "based on true stores or historical events" [50, p. 152-153]. He also highlights the importance of including Chicano culture such as music, language, home alters, food preparation, and the neighborhood [50, p. 154]. Gary Keller built on upon Noriega's elements and perhaps developed the most comprehensive definition of a Chicano film. He identified the following characteristics: 1) subverts Hollywood genres and formulas; 2) innovative use of Spanish and English; 3) innovative use of music; 4) inclusion of mise en scene and of montage (cultural

elements); 5) dealing with relevant Chicano issues at the expense of box office considerations; 6) willingness to employ Chicano talent and production personnel; 7) designed for Chicano audiences; 8) produced in authentic settings [34, p. 208-209].

Although the characteristics of U.S. Latino films have evolved in the past two decades, building on previous research and this study, I have identified these motion pictures as having the following essential elements.

1. The primary storyline revolves around a U.S. Latino or Latin American actor who is also playing a Latino character.
2. The feature films are in English or bilingual (English and Spanish).
3. Most of the significant supporting roles are U.S. Latino or Latin American actors who are playing Latino characters.
4. The featured talent - generally the star, director, writer, and/or producer - typically has name recognition within the Latino community.
5. These films generally are directed, produced, or written by a U.S. Latino or Latin American.
6. The film typically takes places in a predominantly U.S. Latino locale like Texas, California, or in Latin America.
7. The motion picture is often described as a “Latino film” by either the mainstream or the Latino-oriented media.
8. The film marketers make a concerted effort to target U.S. Latino moviegoers by promoting these motion pictures in both mainstream and Spanish-language media.

9. The distributor circulates dubbed or subtitled Spanish-language prints.
10. During award ceremonies, Latino advocacy groups like Nosotros or the National Council of La Raza acknowledge these films.

The definition above encompasses many elements that exemplify the diverse nature of these motion pictures and illustrates the difficulty in defining these films. This description of a U.S. Latino film is further complicated by "hybrid" U.S. Latino films. These motion pictures encompass the same characteristics mentioned above, but often cast an Anglo actor to co-star within the film. These Anglo actors are sometimes hired to play a Latino character. For example, William Hurt plays Luis Molina in *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985) and Armand Assante is cast as Cesar Castillo in *The Mambo Kings* (1992). At other times, Anglo characters are involved romantically with a Latino character. For other instances, Paul Sutton (Keanu Reeves) falls in love with Victoria Aragon (Aitana Sanchez-Gijon) in *A Walk in the Clouds* (1995), and Nicole Oakley (Kristen Dunst) dates Carlos Nunez (Jay Hernandez) in *Crazy/Beautiful* (2001). Anglo stars are often hired to provide a U.S. Latino film with more crossover appeal.

My dissertation attempts to make a clear distinction between marketing and distribution. Marketing is the process of getting the attention of potential target audiences. Typically in the motion picture industry, film marketers implement three types of strategies. First, they can pay for media advertising on the radio, network and cable television, outdoor billboards, and in newspapers and movie theaters. These advertisements can take many forms such as radio spots, television commercials, newspaper advertisements, billboards, and motion picture trailers. Next, film publicists, who often work closely with film marketers, attempt to get their motion picture "free" advertisements through publicity. Publicity is garnered through newspaper, magazine, or television interviews prior to the premiere of a motion picture. Journalists, who champion a particular film, may provide extra publicity by writing additional stories on a director, producer, featured performer, or writer. Respected film critics like Roger Ebert can also generate publicity, especially if they give a motion picture an excellent review. Talk shows like Oprah or Jay Leno are also excellent means of getting "free" publicity. Lastly, marketers attempt to generate interest through grassroots marketing. Grassroots marketing means that marketers go to community leaders, youth groups, churches, and other local agencies and attempt to build a word of mouth campaign within the community. They build a word of mouth through passing out post cards, t-shirts, key chains, and free screenings. Although related to marketing, distribution is quite distinct. An individual who works in distribution is in charge of making sure that the prints are shipped. They also book theaters for promotional, press, and theatrical screenings. As a result, they work quite closely with exhibitors. More importantly, these individuals are in

charge of making sure that the film is placed at the correct locations in order to maximize a film's per screen average and then collect the revenue generated from that particular exhibitor.

Next, I make references to box office grosses, box office rentals, and ancillary revenue. A box office gross is the amount of money that a motion picture generates in a theater. These are the figures that get reported to the media. A box office rental is the amount of money that the distributor actually receives from exhibitors. Typically, the larger distributors receive about 45% to 55% of the box office gross from exhibitors. The final amount is agreed upon after negotiations between the distributor and exhibitors. Often, these discussions can become quite contentious. Ancillary revenue is defined as the amount of money earned after its U.S. theatrical release. This revenue includes foreign, video rental and sell-through, DVD, pay-per-view, premium cable channels, and network television licensing.

The diversity of this ethnic group also makes defining the term "Latino market" extremely difficult. Nevertheless, the Latino market has these essential traits. In many ways, the Latino market is comprised of several different sub markets that can be unified at times by a common language, religion, and a belief in family. One factor making the Latino market difficult to define is that this ethnic group is constantly evolving due to acculturation and immigration patterns. For instance, depending on the country of origin, Latinos immigrated to the United States for a variety of reasons. Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are often motivated by economic conditions and the belief they will be able to provide a better life for their families [51, p. 127]. In contrast, Cubans tend to be middle-

class political refugees. Many Cubans immigrated to the U.S. either in the early 1960s or the 1980s [51, p. 127]. The more recent immigrants from Cuba tend to mirror immigrants from other Latin American countries. They are poor and looking for a better life and economic opportunities in the U.S. Civil unrest in Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua led to the increased immigration of Central Americans in the 1980s [51, p. 127]. These various reasons for immigrating to the United States makes the Latino market extremely elusive, because Latinos do not enjoy similar immigrant experiences that often unite other ethnic groups like Northern/Southern Europeans and Blacks.

Another reason that the Latino market is difficult to define is that this community is extremely diverse in terms of how long they have resided in the United States. On the one hand, the New Mexican's Hispanos have been residing in this part of the country for centuries. They are direct descendants of the Spanish conquistadors and the oldest European culture within the United States [52]. In contrast, there are a growing number of fairly recent Latino arrivals that are only second or third generation Americans. Simultaneously, as the number of acculturated bilingual and English-speaking Latinos grows, many of the nation's new immigrants are still coming from many Latin America countries. These immigration patterns, which show no signs of changing in the near future, mean that the Latino market will continue to be divided between English and Spanish speakers, educated and uneducated, assimilated and resistant to mainstream U.S. culture.

While more than half of Latinos are bilingual, a significant number of Latinos only speak Spanish or English only [51, p. 129]. Males tend to be more bilingual than females [51, p. 129]. About 75% of Latinos speak Spanish at home [51, p. 151]. Consequently, English fluency varies among different Latino subgroups. Puerto Ricans and Spaniards tend to have higher levels of English-speaking capabilities [51, p. 129]. Although retention of Spanish is important for many Latinos, Spanish fluency also varies a great deal within different regions of the U.S. Typically, as Latinos become more acculturated, they are less likely to retain their Spanish fluency as they become more comfortable with English.

Latinos tend to be a collective culture that values family. Consequently, they are likely to reside in the same general area as their relatives or extended family. As a result, Latinos tend to be clustered in a few specific states. About 77% of Latinos live in the following seven states: California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, Arizona, and New Jersey. Latinos typically live in large urban areas. The five most populous Latino cities include New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, and Houston. The high concentration of Latinos in these specific metropolises suggests that promoting films in the media that these local Latinos watch, read, or listen to could be an effective strategy in targeting them efficiently.

While the population figures of Latinos keep on evolving, Mexicans tend to encompass the majority of this market, making up about 60% of all the Latinos residing in the United States. Most members of this subgroup reside generally in the Southwestern states like California, Texas, and in Midwestern states such as Illinois [51,

p. 127]. They typically live in large cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and San Antonio. Central Americans make up about 14% of this population [51, p. 127]. This group is among one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in Los Angeles [52]. Large pockets of Central Americans also reside in Washington D.C., Miami, New York City, and Houston [52]. Puerto Ricans consist of about 11% of this ethnic group [51, p. 127]. They tend to live in New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Orlando. Cubans made up about 4% of the Latino community [51, p. 127]. They tend to reside in the cities of Southern Florida like Miami. Although Cubans represent a small group numerically, Cubans represent a powerful Latino subgroup with a great deal of political and financial power. A large number of South Americans live in New York City, Miami, and Los Angles. Lastly, about a half a million Dominicans reside in New York City.

Many Latinos are more brand-loyal than the mainstream and tend to rely more on word-of-mouth on recommendations [51, p. 137]. The majority of Latinos tend to respond well to Spanish-language marketing efforts that directly target this community [51, p. 143]. For example, independent researchers claim that Spanish advertising is 40% more effective in increasing awareness than in English advertisements with both bilingual and Spanish-speaking Latinos [51, p. 145]. This type of advertising is especially effective when these promotional campaigns are culturally relevant and not simply English-language advertisements that have been translated into Spanish. Perhaps, more importantly, these culturally relevant advertisements definitely increase consumers' perceptions of the company, which is likely to build good will along with brand loyalty. These conservative purchasing decisions provide marketers working at larger or more

popular companies with a tremendous advantage in effectively targeting and retaining this segment of the population as long as these organizations continue to build good will through an effective and sensitive promotional venture.

Latinos tend vary a great deal in terms of whether they prefer to watch, listen to, or read English or Spanish-language media. The initial language that Latinos learn influences the type of media they will watch in the future. Nevertheless, Spanish-language media persists as an effective tool for reaching a large number of Latinos. Among all Latinos, over 80% watch Spanish-language television, nearly 80% listen to Spanish-language radio, and nearly half prefer to read Spanish-language publications [51, p. 145-146]. However, Latino media habits also vary among different cities. For example, San Antonio Latinos listen to a lot of Spanish-language radio and English-language television [51, p. 149]. In contrast, Los Angeles Latinos watch more Spanish-language television and listen less to Spanish-language radio [51, p. 149]. Miami's Latinos also enjoy watching more Spanish-language television than Latinos living in San Antonio [51, p. 149].

The next problem my study wrestles with is how to best implement textual analysis within my political economy study. In order to integrate cultural studies with a political economy approach, I need to examine the film characteristics of these U.S. Latino films as well as how these films were marketed. Though completing a detailed textual investigation is not the ultimate goal of this report, I believe a textual analysis will provide me with some insight regarding the U.S. Latino elements that attracted or repelled moviegoers. While I do believe that some U.S. Latino films may have traits that

may not motivate both mainstream audiences and Latino audiences to attend these types of films, I also argue that film distributors generally have not invested enough time and attention to identifying and marketing potentially profitable Latino themes.

Next, I make a distinction between an independent film distributor from either a specialty or a Hollywood studio film distributor. The definition of "independently distributed film" has changed drastically in the last ten to fifteen years, especially since the early 1990s acquisition of art film distribution stalwarts like Miramax by Disney and New Line Cinema by Time Warner, and the concurrent development of in-house niche market divisions like Fox Searchlight and Sony Pictures Classics. The increasingly consolidated film industry has made it progressively more difficult to include independently produced, marketed, and distributed films in my study. From 1981 to 1993, I define an independent film as a motion picture produced outside the Hollywood studio system, but also as films that could be marketed and distributed by a mini-major such as New Line Cinema or Miramax. After 1993, I define a Hollywood studio film distributor as a large studio or one of the mini-majors, such as Miramax and New Line Cinema, which have the ability to distribute a film to a mainstream audience and to a large number of theaters. I characterize an independent film as a motion picture produced and distributed outside the Hollywood studio system, including the aforementioned mini-majors. I define a specialty distributor as a studio affiliated art film distributor that circulates motion pictures to a limited audience and a small number of theaters, for instance Sony Pictures Classics and Samuel Goldwyn.

Since my research centers on English-language U.S. Latino films, I only briefly mention Spanish-language films, such as Alfonso Arau's *Like Water For Chocolate* and Robert Rodriguez's *El Mariachi*. While I acknowledge most of the U.S. Latino films distributed in the last twenty-three years, my dissertation is not a comprehensive study of every U.S. Latino film released and distributed in this period. In order to fill in the gaps between the periods I have selected, I concisely discuss how the motion picture industry has evolved in the last two decades. In the process, my dissertation isolates and "periodizes" a few notable eras of Latino film production within the New Hollywood epoch. Through a case study approach, my dissertation centers on how various distributors have attempted to target Latino and mainstream audiences over these four distinct periods: the early 1980s (*Zoot Suit*, *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, *El Norte*, and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*), the late 1980s (*La Bamba* and *Stand and Deliver*), the early 1990s (*American Me*, *I Like It Like That*, and *My Family*), and the late 1990s into the 21st century (*Selena*, *Price of Glory*, *Luminarias*, *Gabriela*, and *Spy Kids*). The early 1980s symbolized both the introduction of independent U.S. Latino films and a time when advertisers really began to acknowledge this niche market. The late 1980s signified the arrival of the first Hispanic Hollywood with the first U.S. Latino box office success (*La Bamba*). Simultaneously, this period represents a lack of independent U.S. Latino films as the independent film market suffers greatly. By the early 1990s, the number of U.S. Latino films increases significantly. In the late 1990s and the 21st century, the Latino market has become extremely lucrative and the first U.S. Latino film exceeds $100 million. My case study approach focuses on a variety of independent, art/specialty, and

studio films and how each of these marketers attempted to promote these films to moviegoers. More importantly, in order to be included in my case study section, I had to conduct at least one interview with someone who participated in the marketing process like a producer, marketer, or publicist.

The next dilemma I encountered was the uneven availability of information that I located for individual films. For instances, some of the studio films within my study received a great deal of mainstream media coverage, because they often have the ability to "buy" greater visibility through newspaper, magazine, and television advertisements, and movie trailers. On the other hand, several motion pictures received little press coverage. Most U.S. Latino films lacked notable stars that attract “free publicity” like magazine and talk show interviews. As a result, the information I provide regarding the marketing and distribution of a motion picture varies a great deal from one film to the next.

A portion of my research is similar to Chon Noriega’s study on how four U.S. Latino films were reviewed in thirty various publications during the late 1980s. In his research, Noriega contends that these various periodicals focused primary on the Hispanic Hollywood and the barrio [32]. He concludes that the mainstream press often ignores or fails to review U.S. Latino films [32]. Though not as extensive as Noriega’s research, I also briefly examine how influential critics from mainstream publications like Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun Times* evaluated these films, because these individuals produce columns that have many loyal readers. This is an important element in the

marketing of a motion picture, because many U.S. Latino films are low budget features that are driven by excellent reviews and a good word of mouth.

Throughout my study, I look for micro-changes or generative mechanisms that trigger an observable event in Hollywood's business practices affecting U.S. Latino film distribution. Haralovich (1986) argues that a "micro-history" is necessary not only for understanding everyday life, but to identify specific "segments" within a given culture [48, p. 7]. Furthermore, Allen and Gomery (1985) assert that generative mechanisms in history do not operate in isolation from each other and they are "rarely observable directly" [3, p. 15]. By combining both Haralovich's periodization and Allen and Gomery's generative mechanism, I can effectively pinpoint and analyze specific components of market structure to detect subtle changes in distribution and marketing practices of Hollywood films, specifically U.S. Latino films. For example, how did Coca-Cola's ownership of Columbia Pictures affect the marketing of *La Bamba*?

I utilize Litman's three-prong economic approach (structure, conduct, performance). The purpose of utilizing this approach is to analyze Hollywood's changing structure during four distinct periods and its effect on independent motion pictures like U.S. Latino films. More specifically, this type of analysis allows me to examine how various political, economic, and social events impacted the structure of the motion picture industry. For instance, I can analyze how huge and subtle changes in marketing philosophy and distribution strategies affected low-budget motion pictures like many U.S. Latino films. In addition, it allows me the flexibility to describe how changes in political policy affected the funding of Latino projects, which ultimately had an impact

on how many Latino films were produced and distributed during that particular era. Lastly, I describe social changes within the Latino community and the impact these changes had on motion picture marketers throughout this twenty-year period. It is my belief that the evolving market structure influences the types of U.S. Latino films being developed, produced, acquired, and marketed by the studios and independent distributors in their attempts to cultivate a loyal following among Latino audiences.

A second facet of Litman's model involves market conduct. I specifically study how marketers have promoted U.S. Latino films at different points in time over the last 23 years. Market conduct simply examines how marketers attempted to attract potential target audiences to their motion pictures. In addition, it will describe innovative marketing and publicity strategies that were developed in order to target Latino moviegoers or attempts to emulate successful marketing plans that were being implemented by their competitors. Through case studies and interviews, I gain valuable insight into how studio marketers, art film marketers, and in some cases Latino independent distributors attempted to cultivate Latino viewers as well as outperforming their competitors in developing this niche market.

The final component of Litman's model that I incorporate is market performance. Market performance means how effective a particular plan was in attracting the target audience. In the motion picture industry, market performance is often defined by comparing a film’s total box office rentals (after its split with exhibitors) with its production and marketing costs – if that studio or independent distributor also produced the film. In some cases, a studio or independent distributor compares a film’s box office

rentals with its acquisition costs – if the motion picture was acquired from an outside production company or filmmaker. In this particular case, I will attempt to compare the film's box office rentals with its marketing, production, or acquisition costs in order to determine market performance. This criterion provides me with a more realistic definition of market performance, because a low-budget film's definition of a success is quite different than a studio film's definition. In addition, the skyrocketing costs of marketing and production and the growth of ancillary revenue have also changed the definition of a success. I will utilize the following criteria in trying to determine how much money distributors actually spent on their prints and advertising costs (P & A). The distributors of the early and late 1980s often spent about half of their production costs on prints and advertising. The studio distributors of 1990s most likely spent any where from one-half to two-thirds of their production costs on prints and advertising. The specialty or independent distributors of the 1990s spent about a quarter to one-third of their production costs on prints and advertising.

I also apply periodization and generative mechanisms to my industrial organizational model in order to analyze the evolution of specific industrial events within the Hollywood structure and their effects on ethnic film marketing and distribution. While I agree with Gomery that economics needs to be examined when studying the media, Haralovich and Ramstad do reveal a glaring weakness within this methodology. This top-down theory tends to view product differentiation as merely the production or acquisition of an art film from a specialty division. They opt to overlook films that are developed, produced, and distributed with a particular ethnic group in mind or

independent motion pictures distributed outside the Hollywood structure. They also overlook an audience's favorable or negative responses to motion pictures.

Ramstad and Haralovich acknowledge that the industrial organizational model fails to make a link between economics and audiences. Their argument becomes stronger when we consider that Chicanos tend to be resistant to general market media [53, p. 140]. Rios contends that in spite of a long history of engagement with mainstream print media from radio, television, and a tremendous variety of popular culture mainstream products, Mexican American audiences have been very resistant to the media's dominant messages [53, p. 127, 140]. For example, despite the media's tendency to encourage Latinos to assimilate and speak only English, retaining their language remains a facet of their culture they did not want to lose [53, p. 132]. Rios revealed another important point. Her inquiry discovered that Latinos would avoid unacceptable media content like negative stories about this ethnic group whether it is Spanish-language or mainstream media [53, p. 136]. This study asserts that Latinos are not a passive audience which will support media simply because it is directed towards them; nor are they loyal to Spanish-language media.

While the scholars above describe the importance of an economic perspective, my dissertation needs to incorporate a bottom-up approach in order to analyze whether Latino and mainstream audiences responded favorably to the marketing and advertising of Hollywood and independent distributors by attending these films. In order to bridge this academic gap between cultural studies and political economy, I incorporate John Fiske's notion of interlocalism and Kraidy's hybridity. Fiske describes interlocalism as a

location where several cultures encounter one another and develop a unique culture. The mass media plays a vital role in gaining access to this ethnic group. He argues that media conglomerates constantly scan these interlocal communities in order to identify cultural products that are potential commodities. My case studies illustrate that Hollywood studio marketers generally have failed to gain access into these diverse Latino communities and in their attempts to develop this ethnic group into a single viable niche market. Consequently, Hollywood, for the most part, has had difficulty identifying cultural products that resonate with most Latinos. This in turn has resulted in mediocre, at best, box office results.

Marwan Kraidy's notion of hybridity also assists me in developing a better connection between cultural studies and political economy. She contends that hybridity is an important component when studying culture and media as well as an element that cannot be overlooked when studying hegemony. Following Kraidy, I argue that many U.S. Latino films like *La Bamba* and hybrid Latino films *Crazy/Beautiful* are being distributed within the traditionally hegemonic Hollywood structure. Simultaneously, many of these films are directed and produced by U.S. Latinos who often have been equally influenced by both American and U.S. Latino cultures. This bicultural influence on Latino directors and producers is seen in their films and hybrid text. Prime examples are films like *Zoot Suit* that feature a variety of languages including English, Spanish, Spanglish, and Calo, a language spoken by many Latino youth throughout the Southwest. In addition, *Zoot Suit* represented a popular Los Angeles-based play that later became the first play by a Chicano to be presented on Broadway. Long before Hollywood decided to

develop this play into a motion picture, its roots were within the Chicano movement. In other words, *Zoot Suit* represented an encounter between the Hollywood structure and Chicano movement. A subtler and perhaps a more effective example of a hybrid text was Spy *Kids*, which utilized both Spanish and English; however, this film was not marketed by Dimension as a U.S. Latino film to mainstream audiences.

The theoretical slants above that I apply implement both a top-down as well as a bottom-up approach. Because Chicano film emerges from a market sensitive industry that is attempting to decipher and cultivate this growing audience, an economic approach will be an important element to my study. At the same time, some Chicano or U.S. Latino films are cultural products with roots that are firmly embedded in the early Chicano movement. I assert this mixture of the Hollywood studio system, traditionally a white male perspective, with a cultural perspective of a Chicano/Latino director or predominantly Latino cast results in what Kraidy refers to as a hybrid text. Litman, Fiske, and Kraidy all state, but from different theoretical perspectives, that there is a continuous give and take between the producers of culture and their audiences which keeps customers loyal and companies profitable. I will focus on how this hybrid text is promoted and distributed by Hollywood studios and independent distributors. Simultaneously, through my analysis of marketing material, personal interviews, newspaper and trade articles, I will attempt to explain how and why the Latino community embraced or chose to disregard some of these U.S. Latino films.

Chapter breakdowns:

My second chapter will provide a brief historical overview of the attempt by the American and Mexican film industries to develop and cultivate a U.S. Latino market. I shall describe how the American film industry initially produced Latino musicals with the intent of exporting these motion pictures throughout Latin America and yet failed to produce motion pictures for the U.S. Latino audience. This trend of not really perceiving the U.S. Latino market as viable would continue until the early 1980s when Hollywood began to distribute U.S. Latino films. On the other hand, the Mexican film industry perceived the U.S. Latino market as lucrative and important export market for its products. The Mexican film industry had a great deal of long-term success in attracting U.S. and Spanish-speaking Latinos to its motion pictures from the 1930s to the early 1980s. For instance, as late as 1980, Azteca Films earned grosses of over $10 million in American theaters, most of which was earned in the Southwest [54]. I conclude the second chapter by briefly discussing how studios begin to produce motion pictures like *Up in Smoke* (1978) and *Boulevard Nights* that targeted U.S. Latinos.

The third chapter examines the rise of U.S. Latino films from 1980 to 1985. In the first portion of the chapter, I focus on the generative mechanisms that occurred during this time resulting in a rise of independent film production. Many independent films were produced outside the Hollywood studio system in this period, including a few U.S. Latino films. I also describe the U.S. Latino marketplace this era such as pointing out the significance of 1980 Census. I proceed with a brief summary of the U.S. Latino films like *Latino* (1985) that were premiered in this particular period. I then conduct case

studies of four films -- *Zoot Suit*, *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, *El Norte*, and *Kiss of the Spider Woman* -- where I describe how these four motion pictures were promoted and distributed. I conclude my chapter by providing key events that influenced the distribution of independent U.S. Latino films.

The fourth chapter describes the increasing importance of the U.S. Latino niche market in the mid-to-late 1980s. I also explain why many independent distributors went out of business and how this affected independent U.S. Latino films of this era. Furthermore, I describe how independent filmmaking was affected by a changing antitrust policy during the Reagan administration and how this allowed the studios to return to a vertically integrated mode and quickly regain control of motion picture distribution. Simultaneously, I illustrate how the dearth of independent film distributors benefited some independent U.S. Latino films, because they were able to secure studio distribution. Next, I analyze how U.S. Latino films of this period like *Salsa* (1988) were distributed. I then describe how *La Bamba* and *Stand and Deliver* were promoted and distributed. I conclude chapter four by pointing out the key events that took place, both in the general film industry and within the U.S. Latino filmmaking community, which affected how U.S. Latino films were promoted and circulated in the late 1980s.

In the initial portion of the fifth chapter, I briefly describe the growth and buying power of the U.S. Latino market of the early 1990s. I also describe the consolidation of the art film market with the acquisition of New Line Cinema and Miramax in 1993 and the development of studio-affiliated specialty divisions. After the acquisition of these art film stalwarts, I summarize how independent distributors had trouble competing with

these two mini-majors. At the same time, I illustrate how U.S. Latino films utilized the Sundance Film Festival in order to attract a distributor. Next, I examine how the various U.S. Latino films of this period like *Hangin with the Homeboys* (1991) were advertised and distributed. I then conduct case studies to examine how *American Me* (1992), *I Like It Like That* (1994), and *My Family/Mi Familia* (1995) were marketed and distributed. I conclude chapter five by summarizing how critical events like revitalization of independent films effected U.S. Latino film distribution and promotion.

The initial portion of sixth chapter examines why Hollywood studios began to avoid developing and distributing U.S. Latino films, despite the fact that the Latino population and buying power continued to grow. I explain why the late 1990s through 2001 marketplace was extremely difficult for independent U.S. Latino films that did not secure a studio-affiliated specialty distributor. I also describe the emergence of a few Latino distributors that attempted to target English-speaking and Spanish-speaking moviegoers. Next, I describe the various U.S. Latino motion pictures that were dispersed in this period. The remainder of this chapter focuses on how *Selena* (1997), *Price of Glory* (2000), *Luminarias* (2000), *Gabriela* (2001), and *Spy Kids* (2001) were promoted and marketed to moviegoers. I conclude chapter six by providing an overview of the key events and influential individuals of this period that affected how U.S. Latino films were promoted.

In chapter seven, I analyze the current marketplace from 2002-2004. I quickly describe the U.S. Latino market and growing importance of Spanish-language media. I also highlight the recent reemergence of high quality films that have been produced

through Latin America and Spain. While Latin American films have been extremely successful and lucrative product for distributors, recent U.S. Latino films of this era have also been quite profitable and critically acclaimed. I describe how these motion pictures have been promoted and distributed. I conclude this chapter by pointing out some of significant events that have occurred in U.S. Latino filmmaking and distribution.

The final chapter summarizes my entire study. I provide informed generalizations of each period that I studied and highlight the characteristics of that particular era. I describe some of barriers that need to be overcome within the Latino community as well outside in order for this ethnic group to truly match its box office promise. Lastly, I provide some recommendations to distributors on how to potentially improve their chances of attracting more Latino moviegoers.

Conclusion

This dissertation analyzes how Latino films have been distributed within the New Hollywood structure. Some Chicano film scholars like Charles Ramirez-Berg have focused on either negative or positive representation of Latino images. Chicano film scholar Chon Noriega has written a book on the early history of Chicano film. Noriega has also studied how mainstream newspapers reviewed U.S. Latino films. Other Chicano scholars, such as Coco Fusco and Tomas Ybarra Frausto, study different phases of the Chicano film movement. Some scholars, such as Coco Fusco, acknowledge that there is a viable Latino audience that is not being cultivated by Hollywood. Furthermore, some scholars mentioned above have also recognized the importance of a sound marketing plan, especially for lower-budget, U.S. Latino films.

However, Chicano film scholars do not go into a great deal of detail about the importance of marketing within the motion picture industry. I contend that merely citing the importance of advertising and distribution is not enough. Though I do believe that studying the historical representation of Latinos is relevant in terms of how mainstream society perceives this ethnic group, I argue that the first step to improving Latino images is to encourage Hollywood to produce, distribute, and exhibit more U.S. Latino films that include rich multi-dimensional characters as opposed to the traditional one-dimensional "bandito" images. Through savvy and effective marketing of these U.S. Latino films, I believe distributors will discover that U.S. Latinos tend respond to diverse portrayals of their ethnic group and they will likely notice that these motion pictures produce higher box office figures for their companies.

New Hollywood scholars such as Richard Maltby tend to examine the New Hollywood by only investigating the high budget films or high concept films. Barry Litman and Douglas Gomery focus on industrial changes by using economic theoretical models, such as the industrial organizational model. Tino Balio and Justin Wyatt have written essays on art film distributors, such as New Line Cinema and Miramax. Greg Merritt and Emanuel Levy write books on the growth of American independents, while they acknowledge the growth of U.S. Latino films, they do not examine how these films were marketed or distributed. Harold Vogel cites the projected growth of America's youth or Hollywood's target market. Scholars such as Thomas Schatz have written valuable essays on the evolution of marketing campaigns in the New Hollywood.

Nevertheless, the New Hollywood scholars cited above have, for the most part, ignored ethnic-oriented motion pictures.

While scholars, such as Douglas Gomery and Justin Wyatt have defined the New Hollywood as an era in which studios have a unique ability to identify and market films to diverse groups, these New Hollywood scholars have disregarded the question of how and why Hollywood studios traditionally fail to successfully market and distribute U.S. Latino films. Through periodization, I will be able to analyze the generative mechanisms that potentially influenced how and why these U.S. Latino films were marketed in this particular manner. Ultimately, I will make an effort to discover how New Hollywood marketers and distributors have attempted to expand Latino movie attendance, and which of these attempts, if any, proved effective.

The scarcity of literature focusing on Latino film marketing and distribution from both Chicano film scholarship and New Hollywood scholars leads me to believe that my dissertation represents one of the few studies to actually examine the way in which Latino films were advertised and circulated in the New Hollywood. I am hopeful that my dissertation will motivate other scholars to study this concealed part of Hollywood history. I contend that my study will be an important reference to two diverse audiences. First, my document will be a valuable resource to marketers who are looking to attract their Latino audiences. Next, my dissertation will be an important piece of scholarship and history for an understudied, underserved and growing Latino population.

I introduce each chapter with cultural and industrial changes that have had a significant impact on the Latino community, affecting how, where, and why Latino films

were marketed and distributed. By providing a studio and independent film marketing perspective, I am able to provide a detailed case study of how each of these entities developed promotional strategies that were effective in attracting Latino moviegoers. I also reflect in my analysis on some of the industrial restrictions faced by each of these distributors such as the lack of theaters in Latino neighborhoods. Another example of these restrictions is the escalating marketing budgets, which no longer allow film distributors the luxury of slowly developing a word of mouth campaign to influence potential ticket buyers. In the conclusion of each chapter, I provide a brief overview of events that occurred in both the marketplace and in Latino-film production and marketing.

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CHAPTER 2: HOLLYWOOD'S AND MEXICO'S HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP WITH U.S. LATINO AUDIENCES

Alex Saragoza has described Mexicans living in the United States, as "cinematic orphans," which is an appropriate term that can be applied to most U.S. Latinos who have grown up watching either American or Mexican cinema. Throughout their respective histories, the Mexican and U.S. film industries for various economic and political reasons have treated the U.S. Latinos market as an after thought. Both industries have illustrated this tendency through the negative depiction of U.S. Latinos in films produced within each country. That is not to say that Hollywood or Mexico City have not developed, produced, marketed, and distributed some sympathetic and profitable films about U.S. Latino issues or Latin American heroes. However, when Hollywood has produced these types of films, a non-Latino actor tends to be featured as the Latino protagonist. In contrast, the Mexican film industry for its own political reasons tended to celebrate the virtues of being "Mexicano" and illustrated the dangers of becoming too Americanized or "pocho." In other words, U.S. Latinos historically have been in a cinematic no-man's land where neither the country they migrated from nor the country they currently reside in wants to make them full citizens in their respective cinemas.

This chapter provides a brief historical overview of how the Mexican and U.S. film industries have attempted to develop and cultivate Latin American and U.S. Latino audiences from the late 1900s to the late 1970s. Simultaneously, it also highlights significant global and hemispheric events that led Hollywood to produce Latino-oriented films for Latin American audiences, but not necessarily intended for this ethnic group.

Furthermore, this section provides a brief summary of how the U.S. and Mexican film industries generally have attempted to attract and widen its Latin American audiences living north of the Rio Grande. Lastly, I will briefly explain the origins of Chicano cinema in the 1960s and why it was responding to the dominant images of Chicanos in both Mexican and American films.

Early Latino Depictions (1908-1929)

Hollywood's silent films often stereotyped Mexican males as the "greaser" in many early Westerns. These greasers often were Anglo men who wore dark makeup to enhance their brownness and enable audiences to easily detect the protagonist and antagonist of the film [1, p.10]. On the other hand, Latinas were docile, fair-skinned, and of Spanish descent, which gave their roles a higher status on the U.S. racial hierarchy than their Latino counterparts [2, p. 142]. However, they were still not considered equals to Anglo characters. This early depiction of Latinos suggests that they were not considered a viable movie going audience. Furthermore, early Westerns utilized the term "greaser" within the film titles, such as, *The Greaser's Gauntlet* (1908) and *Broncho Billy and the Greaser* (1914), in order to promote the film to the public [3, p.132]. The word "greaser" has several negative origins, "referring to a non-Anglo or lower class individual" [4, p.5]. It also describes how Mexican laborers put grease on their backs to reduce the friction between their clothing and their skin when they were unloading cargo [4, p. 5]. Early Hollywood filmmakers consequently relied on imagination, existing literary stereotypes (dime novels and Westerns), press coverage, and newsreel footage of the Mexican Revolution in order develop the Latino bandito into the convenient villain

for Westerns [5, p. 75-76, 6, p.17]. These films were distributed to rural audiences who did not question the negative depictions of Mexicans, because they had little daily interaction with Mexicans or were generally unfamiliar with their culture [5, p.75 & 80]. Filmmakers took advantage of these ignorant moviegoers, who were easily baited, to react negatively towards Mexican characters [5, p. 80].

During World War I there was a brief respite from the Latino bandito stereotype, since films began to focus on the conflict in Europe and how the United States was preparing itself for the war [5, p.80]. But, after World War I, Latino villains returned to the big screen. Mexico reacted to this negative depiction of Mexicans and of Mexico by denying the entry of these offensive films into its country as well as all films distributed by the particular studios that were distributing these offending motion pictures [7]. Mexico's ban galvanized several Latin American countries like Argentina, Peru, Panama, and Spain. These nations were also tired of this negative Latino representation and supported the Mexican ban [8, p. 58 - 59]. The damaging depiction of Mexicans was so widespread in American films that many of the larger Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) member companies such as Famous Players-Lasky (Paramount), Metro, Warner Bros., Educational Film Exchange, Selznick Pictures, Goldwyn Pictures, and Vitagraph, had their films banned by Mexico [7].

The American film industry in the 1920s employed two different strategies to circumvent this ban and to keep its films playing within these rapidly growing foreign markets. First, Hollywood invented fictional Latin American countries, such as Costa Roja in *The Dove* (1927) [9, p.98]. Filmmakers also attempted to balance the depiction

of Latino characters by featuring positive Latino characters (typically light skinned actors) as well as the traditional "greaser" Latinos (dark skinned) [9, p.98]. These plans to improve the representation of Latinos on screen were inadequate and further angered U.S. Latinos and citizens of other Latin American countries who did not feel that Hollywood was going far enough to improve its depictions of Mexicans and the Latino culture [10, p.22].

Hollywood's Spanish-language Film Experiment (1930-1939)

A couple of significant occurrences forced Hollywood to begin to pay a little more attention to the U.S. Latino market in the 1930s. First, by the late 1920s, Mexico and Argentina began to export films to the United States. These two film industries specifically targeted the underserved Spanish-speaking communities of the United States [10, p.6]. In addition, the National Autonomous University of Mexico in 1930 created a study on the effects of stereotyping and the impact of English-language films on Mexican audiences [10, p.22]. One of its conclusions was that Hollywood was only concerned with losing its Latin American market and was not really worried about providing motion pictures that targeted U.S. Latinos [10, p.22]. Hollywood studios responded to this perception and increasing competition from Spanish-language film industries by developing Spanish-language divisions in the 1930s [10, p.6].

Most of the major Hollywood studios such as Columbia, Paramount, Fox, Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) produced Spanish-language films, which utilized the same sets, costumes, and locations as the English-language productions [4, p.15]. Paramount and Fox were the two most aggressive studios in producing foreign language films.

Paramount developed a studio facility outside of Paris dedicated to foreign language film production [11, p. 92]. This facility dubbed film into several different languages. Fox went further by producing original Spanish-language films [12]. Hollywood typically produced three types of Spanish-language films. Generally, most of these motion pictures were merely a Spanish version of an English-language film [12]. They also produced a Spanish adaptation of a silent film or a Spanish-language original [12]. Hollywood's Spanish-language divisions were quite prolific from 1930 to 1935, when they produced 113 films [13, p. 120]. However, Hollywood stopped generating Spanish-language films, because they were too expensive to produce [6, p. 32]. In addition, Latin American audiences did not enjoy these Spanish-language studio films.

It appears that there were four primary reasons why Hollywood's Spanish-language films failed with Latin American mass audiences. First, Hollywood did not take full advantage of its best-known Latina starlets Dolores Del Rio and Lupe Velez. While Ramon Navarro, Gilbert Roland, and Antonio Moreno starred in Hollywood's Spanish-language films, the biggest Latina starlets at the time were never utilized [10, 14, p. 32]. Next, these films illustrated Hollywood's cultural ineptitude when it came to being aware of the various Spanish dialects spoken in Latin America [15, p. 45]. Ignorant producers recruited a wide variety of Latino actors with various accents for these Spanish-language films, assuming that Castilian Spanish was acceptable throughout the Western Hemisphere [14, p. 32]. Consequently when these films were distributed throughout Latin America, they were not accepted by mass audiences who were not accustomed to hearing their native language butchered by various actors who spoke

different types of Spanish [4, p. 15]. The third factor appears to be a contradiction, but Latin American audiences wanted to see American stars and did not attend these Spanish-language versions to watch Latino replacements [4, p. 16, 13, p. 120, 14, p. 32]. Lastly, while most Latin American countries share a common language and religion, their cultures and their Spanish dialects are distinct. Hollywood had a difficult time figuring out a successful formula that appealed to diverse audiences in Spain, Mexico, Argentina and other Latin American countries [13, p. 120].

Columbia Pictures' *Verbena Tragica* (1939) was perhaps the last effort by Hollywood to appeal to Spanish-speaking Latino moviegoers in the 1930s [14, p. 33]. The film also encapsulated the problems that Hollywood had in cultivating Latino moviegoers and developing universal Latino themes. The motion picture starred long-time Mexican star Fernando Soler who plays the role of a Spanish immigrant in New York [14, p.33]. Carl J. Mora (1989) asserts that a film about a Spanish man in New York illustrates Hollywood's misperception of the Latin American market [14p. 34]. The subject matter was ill-conceived, because few U.S. Latinos in San Antonio and Los Angeles or Latin American audiences in general would be interested in a Spanish protagonist living in New York [14, p. 34]. Perhaps, a better strategy would have been to feature Soler as a Mexican living in a Southwestern city like Los Angeles, since the major Latino group in the late 1930s was Mexican-Americans or Mexicans, who primarily resided in this region [14, p.34]. Columbia Pictures would have increased its potential for success by developing a motion picture that centered on a Mexican protagonist, because the studio had a built-in audience.

Hollywood's inability to effectively attract Latinos to its 1930s Spanish-language motion pictures and the influx of films from Latin America, primarily from Argentina and Mexico, helped to develop heavily populated Latino cities such as Los Angeles into extremely important areas for Spanish-language film distribution [10]. Los Angeles had many Spanish-language theaters in close proximity to a large number of Spanish-speaking moviegoers. The loyal following of Mexican films by Los Angeles moviegoers was one of the primary reasons that the Mexican film industry enjoyed economic success in the 1930s [10]. Simultaneously, the Mexican film industry aggressively promoted and marketed its films to the Southern California public by frequently sending its big-name stars to make public appearances in Los Angeles [10].

Another genre of films about Mexican-Americans emerged during the mid-1930s and lasted into the early 1960s, which film scholars Chon Noriega and Charles Ramirez-Berg have identified as “social problem films” [16, p. 52-53]. Some of these notable films were: *Bordertown* (1935), *A Medal for Benny* (1945), and *Giant* (1956). However, these films often did not portray U.S. Latinos positively [13, p. 128 - 129]. The Latino protagonists in these motion pictures attempts to succeed outside of the barrio, but fails for one reason or another and is forced to return to his old neighborhood [16, p. 58]. Despite the fact that these films focus on Mexican Americans, the Hays Office, which regulated U.S. film content from the 1930s-1966, typically was more concerned about offending Mexico than presenting a realistic depiction of U.S. Latinos [16, p. 54 & 61]. Furthermore, the economic pressures to create box office hits inevitably resulted in films that were about "Mexican Americans," but intended to attract general audiences. Charles

Ramirez-Berg (1992) writes that Hollywood made these "social problem" films suitable for mainstream audiences by incorporating these three prerequisites (p.37). First, the leading character was almost always male [17, p. 37]. Next, Anglo men were often cast as the central ethnic characters such as, Paul Muni as Johnny Ramirez in *Bordertown* [17, p. 37]. Lastly, the protagonist was often from an upper class background [17, p. 37]. The second aspect indicate that U.S. Latinos were a marketing afterthought, even when the motion picture was supposed to reflect the Latino community.

Good Neighbor Policy (1939-1945)

Throughout the Good Neighbor Policy (1939-1945), the U.S. film industry produced a number of musicals that took place throughout Latin America. Several factors led the United States to develop more interest in the Latin America market. First, the U.S. realized that there was a growing threat of war throughout Europe. The war would result in short-term loss of this lucrative territory. The likelihood of war motivated Roosevelt to build goodwill and hemispheric unity with other Latin American governments, which had historically been volatile [18]. Roosevelt believed that this gesture could lessen the threat of a foreign invasion in Latin America [18]. The potential for profit also motivated Hollywood to produce more motion pictures that centered on Latin America. Latin American experts suggested to the studios that it could exploit this territory if it implemented some Spanish dialogue into its films [2, p. 144].

From 1939 to 1945, Hollywood produced 84 films that centered on Latin American themes [19, p. 69]. Studios typically conceived three types of Good Neighbor Policy films to distribute to Latin American audiences. Most of these films were

musicals or hybrid-musicals [19, p. 70]. Many of these motion pictures were shot in Latin America. The first group of motion pictures placed the American protagonist in a Latin American country. Studios also produced inexpensive “B” films that co-starred an undistinguished U.S. and Latino actors or entertainers [19, p. 70]. The third category of films was big-budget Hollywood productions with top-notch American and Latino talent. These types of films were the biggest box office hits of the Good Neighbor films [19, p. 70].

During this era, the motion picture industry hired Latin American experts like Addison Durland for primarily two reasons. First, Hollywood attempted to respond to Roosevelt’s policy of spreading goodwill throughout the region. Next, studios potentially could draw larger Latin American audiences with more ethnically realistic Latino protagonists. The Hays Office hired Addison Durland, who was the director of NBC's Spanish division, to avoid blatant cultural errors in motion pictures that would offend key distribution people and audiences in Latin American countries [18, 20, p. 359]. Durland assisted in developing film protagonists that had the following characteristics -- light-complexion, modern, and civilized -- which fit in nicely with the ideal version of a Latin American elite [20, p. 361]. Consequently, dark-skinned Latinos rarely appeared in these Hollywood musicals [20, p. 370]. Durland pressured studios to depict Latin American nations as "modern and prosperous" [20, p. 372]. Lastly, he insisted that if a film was going to include either Portuguese or Spanish dialogue that the actors correctly pronounce these words [20, p. 372].

Another office that attempted to build goodwill, increase solidarity, and avoid

offending Latin Americans in film was Nelson Rockefeller's Office of Inter-American Affairs. Rockefeller hired John Hay ("Jock") Whitney to be in charge of its Motion Picture Section. Both Durland's and Whitney's offices provided technical assistances in order to defend both alliances and markets, and also applied pressure if a studio depicted Latinos negatively [16, p. 54, 18]. Durland and Whitney also encouraged studios to employ authentic Latino stars, which resulted in the importation of Latin American talent [20, p. 367, 21, p. 879 - 880]. In addition, Whitney encouraged Hollywood stars to go to Latin America to spread goodwill and promote their films, but he stopped this strategy after Douglas Fairbanks accidentally insulted everyone he met during a South American trip [18].

Hollywood's goodwill efforts did improve the representation of Latinos in motion pictures. For example, prior to filming *Juarez* (1939), Warner Bros.' researchers spent many hours making sure they realistically portrayed this Mexican hero [20, p. 364]. Warner Bros. also sent key personnel to Mexico for several weeks in order to become more aware of the culture [20, p. 364]. Consequently, in both the United States and Mexico, audiences were impressed with its sympathetic portrayal of Mexican history and its people [3, p. 148, 18]. *Juarez* eventually grossed over a $1 million dollars in the U.S. and about $500,000 in foreign territories [22, [microfiche]].

However, Good Neighbor Policy films generally erased one film stereotype and replaced it with another [18]. For instance, the biggest star of these Latino musicals was Carmen Miranda who usually portrayed the same character -- the exotic, singing Latina [20, p. 378]. Predictably when a Latina appeared in these films, this character would sing

a song from her native country [18]. Furthermore, Ella Shohat (1991) asserts that Latin Americans in these films were limited to roles as musical entertainers [23, p. 235]. The incorporation of Spanish songs became one of the characteristics of these Good Neighbor musicals in order to illustrate the pan-hemispheric unity between the United States and Latin America. In spite of Hollywood's good intentions, these films again illustrated producers' general lack of knowledge of Latin American culture [4, p. 18]. Despite the fact that Hollywood studios sent many producers to Latin America for up to ten weeks, these musicals continued to combine different types of music such as tango, mambo, and rumba from various countries [4, p. 18, 13, p. 122].

Although Good Neighbor musicals were culturally inaccurate, several of these motion pictures were popular with American moviegoers. For instance, *Down Argentina Way* (1940) was one of the first films of this genre and did good business in New York, eventually grossing $2 million at the box office [18, 24, p. 241]. Since some of these movies were successful in the United States, Hollywood assumed that these films would also attract Latin American audiences, because they were set in a Latin American locale [18]. However, the response from Latin American audiences was far from positive. Hollywood executives were surprised by negative reactions from moviegoers throughout the hemisphere [18]. These films were banned or poorly attended by Latin Americans; in some extreme cases, people rioted [4, p. 19]. Latin American audiences had two primary problems with these Good Neighbor Films. They were upset with the misrepresentation of their culture [13, p. 126]. For example, Brazilians were upset that these films did not acknowledge their substantial Indian population [18]. Latin American moviegoers also

found the inter-American unity message to be annoying [18]. In some Latin American countries, for instance Argentina, with new film industries, Hollywood films were seen as an economic threat by local filmmakers whose films were being pushed out of local theaters by U.S. productions [18]. Despite these complaints from their neighbors to the south, musicals such as *Too Many Girls* (1940) and *The Gang's All Here* (1943) remained popular with American moviegoers until the end of World War II [18].

Mexican cinema also benefited from the Good Neighbor Policy. When Mexico declared war on the Axis in 1942, the United States rewarded Mexico by helping it build its motion picture industry with raw film and equipment. Simultaneously, the United States stopped exporting film stock to Mexico's primary Latin American competitors Spain and Argentina [25, p. 86, 26, p. 129]. The United States selected Mexico to be the dominant Spanish language film producer and distributor for two reasons. First, the U.S. feared the pro-Axis inclination of Argentina [14, p. 59]. Next, American wartime films did not interest Latin American audiences [14, p. 59]. U.S. films of this era too often had a patriotic theme associated with the war in Europe, which did not resonate Latin American audiences, including Mexican moviegoers [27, p. 113]. The war effort also drained the U.S. film industry's ability to effectively distribute and dub films to non-English speaking countries [27, p. 113]. On the other hand, Mexican films were attractive to Latin American audiences, since these films did not integrate numerous Spanish accents into their films [14, p. 59]. Mexico also had a common cultural background with most Latin American countries [14, p. 59]. Many Latin American moviegoers preferred Mexican films to subtitled U.S. films, because audiences were

generally illiterate and had a difficult time following U.S. films that were subtitled [26, p. 139].

In return for the United States' technological and financial support, the Mexican film industry often produced films that promoted pan-Americanism and the Allied cause in the war [25, p. 88]. Mexico also produced films like *Cuandos los hijos se van* (1941), *La Abuelita* (1942), and *Campeon in corona* (1945), which typically had two recurring themes. First, the family became an important cinematic symbol, which idealized authority [27, p. 114 & 120]. The adulation of poverty was the other theme. The poor Mexican protagonist was celebrated in these films [27, p. 115]. In contrast, wealthy Mexicans were depicted as flawed individuals [27, p. 115]. This theme resonated with many moviegoers, since most Mexicans were impoverished. These films were also popular with Mexicans living in the United States.

The Mexican film industry (Azteca and CLASA studios) was modernized through the assistance of Nelson D. Rockefeller's Office for Coordination of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) [26, p. 129]. The aid encompassed economic and technological assistance, such as raw stock, equipment, and production support [28, p. 279]. Since Rockefeller had a financial stake in RKO, this particular studio was more involved in OCIAA's Latin American initiatives [29, p. 84]. RKO would eventually develop a partnership with Emilio Azcarraga to construct Estudios Churubusco [29, p. 84]. The OCIAA also asked Walt Disney to take a goodwill tour to Latin America. Disney's trip resulted in a part-animation, part-live action film named *Saludos Amigos* (1943). A few years later, he produced *Three Caballeros* (1945). Both films celebrate Latin American

cultures and Latino moviegoers responded favorably and both motion pictures produced higher box office figures, primarily in Latin American, than in the United States [4, p. 20, 30, [microfiche]]].

As World War II was coming to an end, the United States changed its policy with respect to Mexico. Hollywood no longer felt the need to continue to support the Mexican film industry. Since Mexico was dependent on the United States for raw film stock, the United States could easily control how many films Mexico could produce on a yearly basis. Consequently, in 1945, the United States drastically reduced the amount of raw film stock that it provided Mexico. Charles Ramirez-Berg (1992) estimates that the United States cut the quantity of raw film stock sent to Mexico by about 66% from the amount that it had previously allocated during the war years [31, p. 39]. In effect, the United States limited Mexico's ability to effectively compete for the Latin American territory by not providing it with enough raw film stock. This is not to assume that Hollywood studios with their great ability to mass produce motion pictures, would not have been able to eventually become the prominent film distributor to these countries, it simply hastened the process.

Post World War II (1946-1964)

During the war, RKO certainly did help improve the production capability of the Mexican film studios. But RKO could not emulate Disney's success and develop a lucrative formula that would appeal to both Latin American and U.S audiences. It attempted to promote the bi-national star power of Delores Del Rio in *The Fugitive* (1947) [29, p. 86]. In spite of good reviews, the film was a box office bust in both

countries [29, p. 92]. Nevertheless, RKO continued to disseminate Mexican film projects. It had reasonable success with *The Pearl* (1946), which it widely distributed throughout the United States in 1948 [13, p. 135].

After World War II ended, the studios began to produce less Latin American musicals. As the European market opened up once again, Hollywood distributors once again started to focus on these nations. European moviegoers, who were seeking a brief respite from rebuilding their war-torn countries, responded positively American films and began to attend in record numbers. As a result, Hollywood became less dependent on Latin American territories [18]. The growing popularity of television, which often aired these Latino musicals, also reduced the public's demand for these types of films [13, p. 127]. Another reason for the decrease in these Latino musicals was the financial success of dubbing [18]. MGM and Paramount began to dub their film with Spanish-speaking New York actors [18]. The dubbed versions of *Gaslight* and *Bathing Beauty* (1944) were such hits in Latin America that they out-grossed classics such as, *Gone With the Wind* (1939) [18]. Chile was one of the few exceptions where dubbing was not successful [18]. Chilean moviegoers, with their strong accents, could not understand the accents of these actors [18]. Lastly, the American public simply grew tired of the numerous Latin American-themed films [13, p. 127].

After World War II, Mexican films like *Nosotros los pobres* (1947) that celebrated family and poverty continued to attract Mexicans living in the United States [27, p. 109]. Mexican films that featured Mexican stars such as, Maria Felix and Fernando Fernandez, were also distributed actively to U.S. Spanish-speaking theaters and

promoted through its U.S. Spanish-speaking papers [26, p. 128, 27, p. 119]. For example, during March and April of 1948, in Los Angeles, 55 Mexican films were screened in Spanish-speaking theaters and heavily advertised in Los Angeles' Spanish-speaking paper, *La Opinion* [27, p. 113 & 119]. At the height of the Golden Age of Mexican Cinema (1936-1956), when Mexico was producing a numerous high-quality motion pictures, there were 300 Spanish-speaking theaters in the United States that exclusively screened Spanish language films [32]. These theaters were located in primarily two areas and generally attracted two ethnicities, Mexicans in the southwest and Puerto Ricans in New York [32]. Spanish language films were extremely popular with New York moviegoers and attracted up to 35,000 people a week to theaters that screened these films [32].

Leonard Martin, whose family was among the first Spanish-language theaters owners throughout the state of California, describes how they attracted Spanish-speaking audiences to their theaters in the 1950s. Exhibitors initially would buy time on local Spanish-language radio shows in the Central Valley, because they were an efficient means to reach a large number of people. These radio shows were extremely popular, since they were hosted by a local disc jockey (L. Martin, personal communications, September 3, 2002). Martin explains other marketing tools utilized by Spanish-language exhibitors at the time.

> Another way was the programs and mailing list. Many times, it was left up to the theaters to devise artwork for the flyers being handed out. Word of mouth, the stars, (and) posters were also important elements. The Mexican community was isolated and in its own district. Therefore, it was easy to target that audience. A trailer was also used [to advertise the film].

After World War II and the Good Neighbor Policy, the U.S. film industry attempted to recapture control of the Mexican and Latin American markets that it had lost to Mexican film industry by flooding these territories with its product [33, p. 74]. This change in American philosophy resulted in less U.S. financial and industrial support for Mexican film projects [34, p. 165]. These two factors made investments into Mexican film projects more risky. Mexican financiers lacked confidence in their native projects and stopped supporting these ventures. This deficiency of faith in Mexican films led to a steep decline in quality by the 1950s [34, p. 165]. Mexican film producers began to rely heavily on a repetition of low-budget films or formulas such as urban films, comedies rancheras, and "super hero" adventures, which no longer reflected Mexican society [14, p. 99, 35, p. 94]. The growing popularity of television also helped in driving film budgets down [34, p. 177]. Although these low-budget urban films were initially popular with its audiences, especially the poor, this genre became too repetitive for middle-class audiences, an important segment of moviegoers that soon began to drift towards Hollywood films by the 1950s [35, p. 94]. The Mexican film industry soon became pegged as a cinema for poor Mexicans who could not afford a television set [34, p. 177].

The Mexican film industry also faced a huge problem in retaining its Mexican audiences in the United States, because these films portrayed them in a negative light. Besides *Espaldas mojadas* (1953), Mexican films generally did not do a good job of attempting to understand the difficulties that Mexicans in the United States confront in assimilating to a new culture and new language. Mexican films often portrayed Mexican Americans or Chicanos as individuals who were attempting to assimilate to the United

States, while at the same time, forgetting their Mexican roots [36, p. 103]. These motion pictures continually denigrated "Americanized Mexicans" and labeled them pochos [37, p. 174]. The negative depiction of Mexican-Americans in Mexican films was an effective formula for a short period of time, as the primary audience to these films was recent Mexican immigrants. However, in the 1950s, as a growing number of Mexican immigrants became more acculturated and assimilated, this potential audience soon began to turn its back on Mexican films and began to gravitate towards Hollywood films [38, p. 115]. Another reason for this loss in audience was that the Mexican film industry did not reinvest any money in maintaining its Spanish-language theaters in the U.S. These deteriorating movie houses developed a reputation within the Mexican community that they were located in the "bad" part of town, which did not appeal to moviegoers [38, p. 116 & 117]. Americanized Mexicans became more accustomed to luxurious mainstream theaters. Consequently, U.S. Latinos who began attending American films rarely returned to the downtrodden Mexican theaters [38, p. 121].

By the 1960s, the decline in Mexican film quality was quite evident. Mexican independent producers were no longer interested developing high quality motion pictures. They were solely concerned in producing cheap wrestling or horror films that would appeal to mass audiences. They would feature wrestling superstars, such as El Santo, as stars in these films [34, p. 179]. These low-budget Mexican films with little artistic value became known as churros [39]. In spite of the low quality of films that the Mexican film industry was producing, its motion pictures would benefit from an American cultural phenomenon. Beginning in the 1950s, the U.S. had been undergoing a huge population

shift from big cities to the suburbs along with the growth of shopping centers, which resulted in development for larger theaters with multiple screens called multiplexes [40, p. 29]. In response to these changes, exhibition chains began to vacate single screens located in downtown areas and began to build multiplexes in suburban malls. For instance, AMC Theaters started constructing these venues in large shopping centers by the mid-1960s. As Hollywood distributors began to leave these older movie houses, these single screen theaters began to run Spanish-language product that tended to attract recent immigrants. Sundays became a popular day for these theaters and accounted for more 50% of the weekly grosses [41]. Apparently, Spanish-speaking audiences developed a tradition of combining Sunday mass and movie going [41].

After the end of the Good Neighbor Policy, the negative depiction of Latinos returned to the big screen in popular Hollywood films, such as *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948). Nevertheless, Hollywood in the 1950s arguably did produce more films that would appeal to U.S. Latinos than the Mexican film industry. Despite the fact that Hollywood was under extreme pressure from House-Un-American American Activities (HUAC), a government investigation on film content and potential propaganda, it produced some enlightening films that centered on Latino issues or history such as *Viva Zapata* (1952), *The Ring* (1952), *Salt of the Earth* (1953), *The Lawless* (1954), and *Giant* (1956). The most significant of these films is probably *Salt of the Earth*. This controversial film is perhaps best known as being directed by Herbert Biberman. He was one of the Hollywood ten that were blacklisted by the studios for refusing to testify in front of HUAC for allegedly being a communist. *Salt of the Earth* centers on striking

New Mexican miners, who were predominately Latino. These workers strike against a large mining company in an effort to seek more benefits. Their efforts galvanize an entire town, including their wives, who play a vital role in the ultimate success of the strike. *Salt of the Earth* drew criticism from Howard Hughes, the American Legion and other organizations [13, p. 133]. The controversy surrounding Biberman and the political nature of the motion picture prevented the film from being widely circulated throughout the country. All the same, *Salt of the Earth* remains one of the finest films done on a Latino subject matter and a significant feminist film [13, p. 133]. Charles Ramirez Berg (1992) points out that Hollywood films like *The Lawless*, *Giant*, and *The Ring* and independent films similar to *Salt of the Earth* are noteworthy in that they overcame the Hollywood formula where ethnic groups or individuals are often deprecated instead of celebrated and managed to treat Chicanos in a sensitive manner [17, p. 43].

The Chicano Movement (1965-1975)

The 1960s was an era of great social change within our society, as the Civil Rights Movement continued to grow in strength. The Production Code Administration came to an end, which had regulated Hollywood film content for three decades. Filmmakers, who no longer had to worry about the code, became bolder in pushing the boundaries of film content in areas such as interracial relationships and more graphic violence. The relaxation of what was acceptable subject matter was not exactly a positive change for Latinos, who were often cast as evil antagonists in Hollywood films [42, p. 601]. In addition, Hollywood was in the process of losing its control of the Spanish-speaking market to Latin American countries, which had developed their own film

industries as well as celebrities [43, p. 90]. Without a political reason or the economic pressure to present Latinos positively, Hollywood reintroduced the old Latino greaser stereotype in Westerns, such as *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1967), and *The Wild Bunch* (1969) [42, p. 601]. Hollywood also developed a more intense and dangerous Latino villain - the urban gang member [8, p. 70, 42, p. 601]. These bad characters were often the contemporary version of the greaser in *West Side Story* (1961) and *The Young Savages* (1961) [8, p. 70].

In direct contrast to the Latino villain stereotype, Hollywood's growing awareness of the U.S. Latino market did lead them to develop a few "brown macho" heroes in Westerns, which could potentially attract this audience [15, p. 17 & 39]. A couple examples of these characters were Jorge Rivero in *Rio Lobo* (1970); Burt Lancaster as a Mexican American sheriff in *Valdez is Coming* (1971); and Charles Bronson as a half-Mexican in *Mr. Majestyk* (1974), who tries to keep the mafia out of his melon patch [15, p. 40]. These motion pictures that starred an Anglo actor as a Latino failed to attract U.S. Latino audiences [15, p. 40]. This genre was affected negatively by the relatively small size of the U.S. Latino market, which only represented about 4% of the population. At this time, U.S. Latino market did not possess the box office strength of the Black market [15, p. 40].

The recurrence of predominantly negative Latino characters in the media and the growing strength of the Chicano Movement in the late 1960s, even among actors, would lead to the development of a Los Angeles-based advocacy group named Nosotros in 1970. This group of Latino actors headed by Ricardo Montalban would meet with the

studios and act as consultants on film productions in an attempt to improve the representation of Latinos in Hollywood films [13, p. 192]. The activism exhibited by these actors took place at a time when the Chicano Civil Rights Movement was at its zenith. This political movement emerged from various protests, which included the farm workers' struggle to improve their families' living conditions, the Denver Crusade for Justice, New Mexican land-grant movements, the student movement, and the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations [44, p. 141, 45, p. 3]. The diversity within the civil rights movement galvanized most of the Chicano community like never before. Many Americans of Mexican descent, within the movement, began to proudly use the word Chicano as a label that symbolized self-identity and self-determination. The word became popular because it avoided hyphens (Mexican-American) or labels that denied their indigenous roots (Hispanic). The growing pride within the Latino community expanded to demand better media portrayals from the entertainment industry. These protests centered on a variety of issues ranging from media portrayals, industry employment, and access to the media [45, p. 16]. The Latino community and advocacy groups pressured media institutions to develop better channels of access for Latinos, which resulted in more media training programs and admissions to film schools [45, p. 100].

The first generation of Chicano filmmakers emerged from this highly political environment. Luis Valdez founded El Teatro Campesino in 1965, which performed plays to inspire striking farm workers in Central California [45, p.3]. He wrote the Plan of Delano in 1966, in which, he defines the role of the theater and other cultural arts within

the Chicano movement [45, p. 5)]. Valdez would go on to develop what is considered to be the first Chicano film *I Am Joaquin* (1969), an adaptation of Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales' classic poem "I Am Joaquin" (1967). The poem introduced readers to significant events and the important men within Mexican and Chicano history [45, p. 1]. The film version of the poem utilized "rasquache" cinema, which is an aesthetic style that incorporates rough cuts and transitions [45, p. 6]. This style was in direct contrast to the smoothly edited, well-financed Hollywood films. Equally important, *I Am Joaquin* represented the Chicano movement's evolution from a localized, grassroots movement to a mass medium with the ability to reach a large audience instantaneously [45, p. 6].

Other future Latino filmmakers like Jose Luis Ruiz took advantage of the Prime Time Access Rule in 1970, which was a mandate to increase locally produced television programming [45, p. 115]. These filmmakers utilized the Prime Time Access Rule on local television stations, as a means to get into production facilities. They began writing, directing, and producing their Latino programs such as *Ahora!* (1969-70), *Unidos* (1970-71), and *Refleccions* (1972-73) [45, p. 115]. These Latino-oriented television programs helped Latino filmmakers develop a Chicano film aesthetic of their own, which rebelled against both the Mexican and American film industries for their negative representation of the Chicano culture. Gary Keller (1985) explains why Chicano film emerged: "Chicano cinema has been a response to the extraordinary efforts on the part of both Mexican cinema and United States cinema to alternatively repress, caricaturize, or otherwise distort or reject the authentic personae and history of an entire people" [15, p. 48].

Throughout the 1970s, filmmakers also began to produce Chicano short films and documentaries. One of the first significant documentaries was *Requiem 29* (1971), which describes the events that took place on August 29,1970 in East Los Angeles and the circumstances surrounding the suspicious death of Chicano reporter Ruben Salazar [42, p. 613]. Jesus Trevino's *Yo Soy Chicano* (1972) was the first Chicano motion picture to be nationally televised and to deal with the movement from its roots in pre-Columbian history to the activism of the present [15, p. 49]. Shortly afterwards, some filmmakers began to leave television stations to begin their own production companies [45, p. 147]. It was an effort by Chicano filmmakers and producers such as, Moctesuma Esparza, Severo Perez, and Jesus Trevino, to gain more control over production, distribution, and exhibition of their projects [45, p. 147].

Concurrently, an increasing number of political Puerto Rican filmmakers on the East Coast were also producing important films and documentaries that depicted their ethnic group's experiences. The Third World Newsreel collective produced *El Pueblo se levanta* (1968) [13, p. 214]. The film chronicles the activities of Young Lords Party in the Puerto Rican community of East Harlem [13, p. 214]. The migration of a Puerto Rican family is the central theme to a short motion picture titled *The Oxcart* (1970). *The Nationalists* (1973) illustrates the activities of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and one of its leaders Don Pedro Albizu Campos. Furthermore, Puerto Rican Educational and Action Media Council members took over WNET in New York, which resulted eventually in the development of a public affairs series named *Realidades* [45, p. 151]. The series led to a great deal of interaction between East Coast and West Coast Latinos.

The program commissioned several Chicano films such as, *Cristal* (1975) and *Garment Workers* (1975) [45, p. 151].

By the mid-1970s, U.S. Latino public television programming and films received a further boost with the development of the National Latino Communications Center (NLCC) and birth of the Chicano Film Festival in San Antonio. NLCC was established to syndicate Latino programming to public television stations throughout the country and empowered Latino television producers and directors by giving them a broadcast media outlet to disseminate their culture, art, and history. Similar to NLCC, the growing number of documentaries and short films led to establishment of the first Chicano Film Festival in San Antonio in 1976 that provided a vital forum for these various stories [15, p. 49]. This film festival often screened motion pictures that did not receive theatrical distribution or were aired on public or commercial television [46, p. 116]. Much of the film festival's success was its ability to take advantage of the temperate climate in order to reach a large audience through open-air screenings at public parks [46, p. 116].

Mexico & U.S. Produce Chicano Films (1973-1978)

The political movement and growing number of talented U.S. Latino filmmakers caught the attention of Mexico's President Echeverria. It fit in nicely with Echeverria's "la apertura democratica" (the democratic opening) (1970-1976), which was his attempt to liberalize the country as well as heal the wounds of a nation that still remained from the massacre of many students in 1968. The Mexican president encouraged filmmakers to broaden subject matter that were being produced to also include U.S. Latino subjects [39]. Simultaneously, he hoped that broader themes would improve the distribution and

exhibition of Mexico's films in important territories such as the U.S. [39]. As a result, U.S. Latinos began to be noticed by Mexican popular culture. For example, Chicano literature began to get translated into Spanish and Chicano issues appeared in Mexican newspapers [33, p. 76]. The heightened awareness of U.S. Latino culture presented Mexican filmmakers with the opportunity to attract a more diverse and potentially profitable audience, besides the lower class, to the Mexican films. The Mexican government began to produce motion pictures that centered on Mexican-Americans living in the United States. The first Chicano genre film *De sangre chicana* (1973) dramatizes the life of a Mexican family living in San Antonio, Texas [33, p. 78]. It was only a box office hit in Los Angeles [15, p. 18].

The most significant Chicano film produced by the Mexican film industry was *Racies de sangre* (1976). The film was the first time there was a collaborative effort between Chicanos and Mexicans [33, p. 81]. Chicano filmmaker Jesus Trevino directed this tri-lingual (Spanish, English, and Calo – mixture of English & Spanish) Mexican film [15, p. 21, 33, p. 80]. The motion picture focuses on the difficulty of unionizing workers from both sides of the U.S. – Mexico border. This boundary creates a barrier between the two groups and allows the maquiladoras (border assembly plants) to keep exploiting both groups. The film did good business throughout Latin America. Despite its success in those Spanish-speaking territories, the director and the stars of the film had to convince Azteca Films to print subtitled English versions for its release in American theaters [47]. Initially, Azteca was not going to distribute the film in the United States, because it was not convinced the film would resonate with U.S. Latino audiences [47].

However, *Racies de Sangre* was a box-office hit in the U.S. Latino markets [47].

In contrast to *Racies de Sangre*, most of the Chicano films produced by the Mexican film industry were box-office disappointments [15, p. 19]. These films failed primarily, because Mexican filmmakers and producers did not understand the U.S. Latino population or the Chicano movement. For instance, the Mexican film industry produced a film named *Chicano* (1975), which centered on Reies Lopez Tijerina, a significant figure in 1967 within the Chicano movement [15, p. 19]. However, by 1975, he was no longer an important person in this political movement. The film's subject matter failed to attract an audience and it was a box-office failure. Furthermore, these Chicano films targeted recent Mexican immigrants in the U.S., Spanish-speaking people, or people who were closely attached to Mexican churros of the 1960s [15, p. 19]. Unfortunately, these segments of the population did not appear to be interested in Chicano films. The Mexican film industry failed to notice that most of the people within the Chicano movement were high school and college students, young professionals, or acculturated individuals, who were either bilingual or English speakers [15, p. 19]. Although Chicanos did attend these motion pictures, the low quality and unrealistic nature of these films eventually made them unpopular with U.S. Latinos and this genre quickly stopped being produced [33, p. 81].

Even though most Chicano films were not exceptional, a few noteworthy films were produced in the United States such as Robert Young's *Alambrista* (*The Wirejumper*) (1978). The motion picture centers on an uneducated Mexican national who illegally immigrates to California in order to look for a better life [48]. At first, the film

was produced and televised by PBS. After being televised, it proceeded to make the film festival circuit and drew rave reviews. Despite being screened at significant film festivals such as Cannes, the film had a difficult time finding a commercial audience and a distributor [49, p. 270]. Greg Merritt describes what typically happens to these films, "small dramas with predominantly non-Caucasian casts were usually rushed in and out of art houses" [49, p. 270]. Studio distributors apparently had two other major problems with this film. First, the project was already televised on public television. Second, the film was primarily in Spanish [48]. Bilingual Education Services, a distributor that attempted to circulate U.S. Latino films, acquired the motion picture [50]. *Alambrista* was dispersed in New York and Los Angeles, where it had a successful art house release [47, 50].

The late 1970s Feature Films

During the Portillo administration (1976-1982), the Mexican film industry regressed to producing cheap emigrant films that had little regard for production values, featured sub-par actors, and character development [51]. These films had several common themes, such as excessive violence and sex, the oppression of Mexican workers by Anglo employers, and a total disregard of Mexico's social, political, and economic factors that caused millions of immigrants to leave the country [51]. Unfortunately, these cheap films were profitable for independent filmmakers who occasionally hired popular actors such as Pedro Armendariz Jr., Fernando Allende, and Lucia Mendez [51]. These three actors starred in a film called *La Illegal* (1980), a film was so popular that it screened for two or three weeks in most U.S. Latino markets, when most films typically

were pulled after a single week [52]. *La Illegal* grossed over one million dollars in the United States [15, p. 20]. These independent Mexican producers also made use of the state's distributor to widely circulate these motion pictures throughout its chain of 700 full-time and 300 part-time screens in the United States to its target market -- recent Mexican or Latin American immigrants living in the United States [33, p. 85, 41]. As late as 1979, the Mexican film industry did excellent business in the United States, grossing over $10 million dollars with most of the revenue coming from California [53]. These box figures represented 40% of Mexico's export sales [15, p. 20]. The success of Spanish-language exhibition in the U.S. motivated Televicine to purchase Columbia Picture's Spanish language film division in 1980, which included its extensive Spanish-language film library [54].

By the end of the 1970s, it appeared that there would be more U.S. Latino films being produced outside and inside the Hollywood studio system based on the success of *Up In Smoke* (1978). This motion picture was perhaps the first film to illustrate the potential box off muscle of the Latino moviegoers and galvanized the Los Angeles' Latino community. The distributor even used Latino gang members in designating theaters – safe or not safe (Thom Mount, personal communication, July 18, 2003). This strategy proved to be effective with U.S. Latinos, as they strongly supported the film [47, 50]. More importantly, *Up In Smoke* proved that a motion picture that featured a Latino and Asian character was capable of crossing over to a mainstream audience. Director Lou Adler, Richard "Cheech" Marin, and Tommy Chong made guest appearances on radio stations to promote the film [55]. The distributor also employed a creative tagline,

"Don't Go Straight to the Movie" to promote the film. Surprisingly, the Motion Picture Association of American (MPAA) initially did not find the tagline problematic. However, after a short period of time, the MPAA ordered that the distributor pull advertising with this tagline. This low-budget motion picture grossed over $65 million on a 500 print release and it was the biggest comedy hit of 1978 [56, 57, 58, p. 184]. The success of this film would result in several sequels throughout the early 1980s.

In the late 1970s, Hollywood studios continued their trend of developing films about Latinos that centered on urban gangs in films such as Warner Bros.' *Boulevard Nights* (1979) and Universal's *Walk Proud* (1979). Warner Bros., the distributor of *Boulevard Nights*, planned to spend approximately $2.5 million in marketing [59]. *Walk Proud* was advertised as "a story of love and loyalty set against the turbulent background of the Mexican American community" [60]. The film distributor targeted Latino markets with its preliminary release [61]. Despite protests from Latino groups for its negative depiction of the community, *Boulevard Nights* performed well in Latino areas [62, 63]. However, several gang shootings took place during the film's initial release, which severely undercut favorable word of mouth. With the potential of more violence, the film was pulled from some Southern California venues as well as San Francisco [63]. In the end, *Boulevard Nights'* earned only about $3 million at the box office [47].

In contrast to Warner Bros. *Boulevard Nights* that featured Latino talent, *Walking Proud* starred Robby Benson, whose complexion and eye color were altered to appear Latino, which drew a lot of criticism from the Latino community [64]. Universal defended its decision to cast Benson as a Latino, because he was a well-known star that

potentially attracted a mainstream audience and without him the film would not have been produced [65]. Universal planned to slowly release the film until it reached between 400 to 500 prints [66]. *Walking Proud* was marketed as a Romeo and Juliet love story [59]. It attempted to attract a broader audience via the rating system (PG), which gave potential moviegoers the impression that the film content was not too violent [67]. This was in direct contrast to the "R" rating given to similar films like *Boulevard Nights* or *The Warriors* (1978), which were both released prior to *Walking Proud* [67]. Unlike *Boulevard Nights*, which Nosotros found to be stereotypical and did not support, Universal cited that this advocacy group had been working closely with *Walking Proud* [65, 68].

Nevertheless, the violence that beset the two previous gang films discouraged Universal from broadly releasing *Walking Proud* to its target audiences [61]. During its initial release, Universal specifically avoided areas with heavy Latino populations [69]. It did not release the motion picture in four key Latino markets -- Los Angeles, San Francisco, Dallas, and Denver -- because Universal feared the type of audience the film may attract [66]. Instead, Universal released its film in non-Latino areas such as Buffalo, Indianapolis, and West Virginia [69]. This appeared to be an odd strategy for a studio to produce a Latino gang film, yet not vigorously target its two primary target audiences -- Latinos and urban moviegoers. Universal apparently sacrificed *Walking Proud's* potential box office to avoid public relations problems that plagued Paramount (*The Warriors*) and Warner Bros. (*Boulevard Nights*) after the release of those two gang films.

Universal also attempted to attract Spanish-speaking Latinos by dubbing some of

its films such as *Superman* (1978) in Spanish and distributing them to Spanish language theaters. This particular effort to draw more Spanish-speaking Latinos was unsuccessful in Los Angeles where the audience traditionally tended to prefer Mexican films as opposed to subtitled English-language films [70]. Similar to Southern California Latinos, New York City Latinos did not respond favorably to dubbed prints. As a result, the number of New York theaters that played subtitled prints dwindled to two, as they preferred Spanish-language motion pictures [70]. In contrast to either Los Angeles or New York City Latinos, the Cubans in Miami did not appear to mind subtitled prints. These prints tended to perform better than in other Latino cities and were screened at fifteen theaters in the Miami area [70]. The various responses from the different Latino communities illustrated how difficult it was to effectively target ethnic groups.

One of the few Cuban features films of this period was *El Super* (1979). Exiles Leon Ichaso, Manuel Arce, and Orlando Jimenez-Leal produced this motion picture, which was based on an Off-Broadway Spanish-language play [71]. The motion picture was an independent, low-budget Cuban-American story about a homesick, exiled Cuban superintendent living in New York City [13, p. 218]. The film's distributor (Max Mambru Films Ltd.) initially targeted art house audiences as well as Spanish-language audiences, specifically Puerto Ricans and Cubans with both English subtitles and Spanish-language versions [71]. This Spanish-language film did excellent business in Miami and New York [71, 72].

The late 1970s represented a mixed bag for Latinos. On the one hand, Hollywood studios continued to produce stereotypical gang stories about the Latino community. To

exacerbate matters, Universal Pictures decided to cast Robbie Benson as a gang member instead of a Latino actor. On a positive note, Universal Pictures appeared to be the studio that was in the forefront in its pursuit of a U.S. Latino audience, releasing *Up in Smoke* and *Walking Proud*. In addition, Universal dubbed and distributed Spanish versions of *Superman* in order to attract Latino moviegoers. This studio would continue this philosophy of pursing the U.S. Latino market throughout the early 1980s.

In closing, both the United States and Mexican film industries in the early portions of the respective histories generally failed to develop and cultivate the U.S. Latino film audiences. The Mexican film industry fell short because it was primarily targeting a Mexican audience and not Latinos living north of the Rio Grande. In addition, the Mexican government that controlled the film industry did not want its films to depict Mexico in a negative light. In order to deflect potential criticism from its own inadequate economic policies, when Mexico decided to produce motion pictures that centered on border issues, these films depicted Mexican-American negatively, a group that had little or no political power in that country. These motion pictures portrayed these Mexicans as individuals who forgot about their roots or as "pochos" (Americanized Mexican). The trend of harmfully depicting U.S. Latinos continued throughout the 1950s. When the Mexican producers in the early 1970s finally wanted to produce films for U.S. Latinos it did not understand the changing demographics of the market. They developed several low-budget Chicano films that did not appeal to either Spanish-speaking, bilingual, or English-speaking Latinos. These films failed, because Mexican film producers did not realize that they were targeting bilingual or predominately

English-speaking Latinos who were accustomed to watching high-quality Hollywood films and not sub-par Mexican films.

On the other hand, the United States film industry historically did not consider U.S. Latinos to be a viable movie going audience nor were they considered a part of mainstream America. Hollywood also rationalized that U.S. Latinos' moviegoing needs were being met by the Latin American film industries from Mexico and Argentina. These factors led to the negative representation of Mexican-Americans in U.S. films, because the studios wanted to appeal to middle class audiences. This financial consideration reflects a similar strategy used by the Mexican film industry in its pursuit of middle-class Mexican moviegoers.

This is not to insinuate that Hollywood did not produce some excellent films about Latino heroes or Latin American history. However, Hollywood studios often casted non-Latino stars like Marlon Brando to play Latinos like Emiliano Zapata in order to fit the sensibilities of a mainstream audience. While the U.S. film industry has always been concerned with the Latin American market, U.S. Latinos traditionally have not possessed the box office muscle to attract the attention of studio distributors. At other times, various U.S. agencies, especially during World War II, provided assistance to the Mexican film industry in order for it to target Latinos throughout the Americas. As a result, though Latino actors and characters have always been cast and involved in Hollywood films, not until recently has Hollywood distributed and marketed U.S. Latino films with primarily Latino casts that are intended for this audience.

Towards the end of the 1970s, filmmakers like Luis Valdez began to emerge out

of the Chicano movement. They triumphed over many institutional obstacles, such as the lack of access to production facilities and money, to begin writing and producing Chicano documentaries, short films, and plays. Chicano filmmakers overcame their lack of capital by developing their own unique style – rasquache cinema (cinema of the poor). The increasing number of short films and documentaries led to the development of significant Latino film festivals such as San Antonio's Chicano Cinefestival. By 1978, Chicano artistic endeavors continued to gain momentum and had become so popular within this ethnic group that a Chicano play titled *Zoot Suit* was selling out the Mark Taper in Los Angeles. The popularity of *Zoot Suit* was so immense that Universal Pictures decided to develop and produce a motion picture that was based on this Chicano play in 1981. It would signal the first collaborative venture between a mainstream, Hollywood studio and Luis Valdez, a filmmaker that came directly from the Chicano movement.

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CHAPTER 3: RISE OF INDEPENDENT U.S. LATINO FILMS (1980-1985)

Various social, political, and economic factors in the early 1980s led to the emergence of an American independent film movement. This film movement provided a unique opportunity for independent filmmakers to tell their stories to a growing number of moviegoers who were looking for alternatives to Hollywood studio films. While non-studio filmmakers were developing and producing new product, many new independent distributors also began to arise and compete with studio distributors for screens. Within this larger development of independent filmmaking and distribution, Latino filmmakers also began to direct, produce, promote, and circulate motion pictures with predominately Latino casts to both Latino and non-Latino audiences. Similar to many of the independent films of this particular period, most of these early U.S. Latino films like *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982), *El Norte* (1983) and *Latino* (1985) were low-budget motion pictures that were funded outside the Hollywood studio system. While these early filmmakers struggled in raising enough capital to produce these Latino stories, motion picture marketers also encountered a number of obstacles to get these films into theaters and to convince audiences to attend these screenings.

In this section, I will describe the key historical people and events of the early 1980s that influenced how independent U.S. Latino films were developed, marketed, and distributed. I subsequently give a brief overview of how some of these films were promoted and circulated. Lastly, I will explore in further detail through a case study approach, how marketers of important U.S. Latino films like *Zoot Suit* (1981), *The Ballad*

of Gregorio Cortez, *El Norte*, and *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985) attempted to publicize these motion pictures. The purpose of these interviews is to gain a personal insight on what type of strategies they implemented in trying to promote these films and whether or not these approaches were successful in attracting an audience.

Early 1980s Marketplace

The 1980 Census began to provide film marketers and distributors of U.S. Latino films with a market profile of this under researched group. Prior to 1980, Latinos had not been counted as a separate ethnic group, with the exception of being part of a 5% experimental sample group in the 1970 Census. The census pointed out that the Latino population swelled from 4.5% to 6.4% of the population throughout the 1970s [1]. More notably, it indicated that Latinos had grown to nearly 15 million people, which indicated an increase of over 65% in the decade [1]. The projected growth rate of Latinos indicated that it would overtake Blacks and become the largest ethnic group in the United States by the beginning of the 21st century. The primary reason for this increase was that Latinos typically had more children than Anglos or Blacks. In addition, changing immigration patterns from Europe to Latin American and Asia boosted the number of Latinos [2, p. 10]. Millions of Latin Americans migrated to United States in the late 1970s to escape the turbulent governments and civil wars of the region with the hope of improving their lives economically and socially [2, p. 10]. This increasing number of immigrants from throughout Latin America along with the growing number of U.S. Latinos provided these independent films with a potentially large target audience.

The 1980 Census compelled mainstream marketers, including Hollywood marketing professionals, to realize for perhaps the first time that there was a growing domestic audience that was not being targeted by its products. An added incentive for Hollywood distributors was that this growing audience would not be effectively served by the Mexican film industry, because the integrated Latino audiences were more likely to gravitate towards Hollywood films than watch Mexican films [3]. Furthermore, a large percentage of the 15 million U.S. Latinos lived in large cosmopolitan cities with relatively easy access to movie theaters. The increasing box-office potential of U.S. Latinos induced Hollywood to be a little more open to Latino stories [4, p. 151]. Simultaneously, an emergent talent pool of Latino film directors, producers, and actors had been using public television studios to produce short films and documentaries as a means to improve their skills. In the early 1980s, after many years of struggling to overcome Hollywood's institutional obstacles, these Latino filmmaking pioneers, such as Moctesuma Esparza and Luis Valdez, began to make significant inroads within the U.S. film industry in the early 1980s. The efforts of these film directors and producers, as well the box office potential of this underserved audience, led to the emergence of Latino stars such as Raul Julia and Edward James Olmos [4, p. 151].

This growing talent pool created a number of independent U.S. Latino films like *Zoot Suit*, *El Norte*, and *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*. They also displayed two characteristics that are best described by Emanuel Levy, the author of the *Cinema of Outsider*s. First, they generally were financed outside the studio system [5, p. 3]. For example, all the Latino films included in this chapter, with the exception of *Zoot Suit*,

received production funds from a variety of sources such as, foundations and private investors. Next, Levy cites film critic Roger Ebert who believes the next vital element of independent filmmaking is that the director retains creative control of motion picture instead of a committee of people [5, p. 3]. For instance, Gregory Nava did not follow conventional wisdom when he produced *El Norte*, a predominately Spanish-language film, because foreign-language films typically had not performed well with American audiences. While the majority of independent U.S. Latino films had both of the qualities mentioned above, these particular films were unique, because these were new types of stories that were being told from a group of people that had not only been historically underserved, but underrepresented in every possible area of motion picture development process.

The film marketers assigned to advertise the initial "wave" of U.S. Latino films of the early 1980s also were given a difficult task, because these motion pictures lacked marketing budgets and marketable stars. These film marketers essentially were hoping to develop an audience out of an increasing number of assimilated and acculturated Latinos who had been overlooked by Hollywood films for a long period of time. However, these diverse Latino groups such as Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans presented a difficult challenge, because they did not share common histories or political beliefs. Besides U.S. Latinos, another potential audience for U.S. Latino film promoters were the art-film moviegoers. Art film audiences preferred an alternative type of film that would expand their cinematic horizons [5, p. 30]. Next, this group of moviegoers also represent a potentially lucrative niche market, because they frequently attend movies [5, p. 29].

Lastly, art film audiences tend to be older and more affluent [6, p. 265]. The characteristics of this audience made them a promising demographic for Latino films, because they were more likely than the typical mainstream moviegoer to be attracted to films written, directed, or produced by Latinos, with a predominantly Latino cast, and focusing on Latino subject matters. Consequently, the success or failure of these initial Hollywood and independent distributors of U.S. Latino films would be determined by how well they targeted and attracted both the Latino groups and art house audiences.

United Artists pioneered the marketing of art films or foreign-language films by developing the UA Classics, after the box office success of *La Cage aux Folles* (1978) and *The Last Metro* (1980) [7, 8, p. 17]. The success of UA Classics triggered other studios to develop their own classics divisions, such as Triumph Films (a partnership between Columbia Pictures and France's Gaumont) [7]. Shortly afterwards, these Hollywood classic divisions began to distribute Spanish-language films from Latin America and Europe as well as U.S. Latino films that catered to both art film audiences and U.S. Latinos. For instance, MGM/UA Classics circulated an extremely successful film from Brazil, *Gabriela* (1983). Orion Classics released a profitable Spanish-language film, *Carmen* (1984) [9]. Almi also released successfully distributed the critically acclaimed *La Historia Oficial* (*The Official Story*) (1985), which eventually earned an Academy Award for Best Foreign Picture. Miramax had mixed results with *Erendira* (1983) and *Crossover Dreams* (1985) [9]. Perhaps, the most lucrative U.S. Latino film distributor was Island Alive Pictures, which marketed two of the biggest box office successes, *El Norte* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*.

Universal Pictures was the first Hollywood studio to recognize the importance of the Latino market and began to target this segment of the population (Art Brambila, personal communication, July 7, 2003). The studio developed a department of special markets headed by Art Brambila. One the department's goals were to attract more Latino moviegoers to its films. Brambila hired the Spanish Connection, a Spanish-language advertising agency, to produce Spanish-language electronic press kits (EPKs), because none of the studios were producing these supplies for their publicity campaigns. In addition, Brambila described how Universal monitored these special campaigns to Latinos (personal communication, July 7, 2003).

> They would compare the theaters that happened to be in Latino areas with the grosses of others in that city. They found out that where I did the campaign and the box offices were 10% to perhaps 40% higher for comparable theaters. They were just thrilled, because we were bringing in a lot more money immediately when we began to speak their language, advertise, and publicize in their media.

In 1985, Universal was one of the first studios to simultaneously release both a Spanish and English version of a film with its re-issue of *E.T.: The Extraterrestrial* [10]. The success of Universal's campaigns motivated other studios to begin to examine the Latino market more closely.

Similar to Universal's special markets department, Embassy Pictures, a part of Embassy Communications, also developed a short-lived Latino division in the early 1980s in order to enable this distributor to circulate Spanish-language films or U.S. Latino films throughout the United States [11]. The company immediately began to look for more effective distribution strategies for targeting Latinos. Executive V.P. Carlos Barba contended that the traditional distribution plan of circulating English-language

films into Spanish-language theaters several months after its initial release was ineffective [11]. He implemented a strategy that would allow Spanish-language campaigns to take advantage of mainstream promotional plans by releasing Spanish subtitled prints simultaneously with English-language prints (day-and-date release) [11]. Barba contended that a day-and-date release would be an effective strategy, because Latinos are more educated than the industry believed and they are already accustomed to reading subtitles [11]. Embassy implemented this strategy with *The Soldier* (1982) in Los Angeles. It generated a box-office gross of $38,000 over a two-week period, which was similar to the figures generated by the English-language version [11]. Although the film had a brief theatrical run, its limited success illustrated to Embassy that Latinos did respond positively to a bilingual marketing campaign and that they went to a film early in its theatrical run.

The numerous distributors of U.S. Latino films in the early 1980s attempted to take advantage of the skyrocketing growth in the number of theaters, specifically multiplexes, which simply had not existed before the late 1970s. Exhibitors began to build multiplexes throughout United States, especially in the suburbs, as the number of screens grew from 14,000 in 1974 to nearly 21,000 by 1985 [6, p. 26, 12, p. 288]. This type of theater had several screens on the same location and could accommodate several films at once. Exhibitors found multiplexes potentially lucrative, because they could attract different types of audiences to their theaters. Concurrently, through staggering screen times, a single snack bar could still accommodate multiple screens. More importantly, this allowed multiplexes owners to keep employee overhead down, because

they did not need to hire more people. Hollywood distributors may have been caught off guard by this quick growth in screens and could not meet the increasing demands of these exhibitors. Therefore, exhibitors sought alternative films like U.S. Latino films to supplement the lack of product being distributed by the majors [13, p. 108].

Other expanding ancillary markets like pay television and home video stores were in dire need for product, which provided yet another significant financial boost for independent films [13, p. 199]. The growth of cable resulted in the emergence of influential premium channels like HBO. As HBO solidified its place as the most powerful cable channel, it spent millions of dollars to license films in the late 1970s [13, p. 160]. The need for product compelled HBO to become a powerful exhibition force that began to outbid theatrical chains for rights to broadcast particular films on its channel [13, p. 160]. Home video stores were beginning to be built throughout the country by the early 1980s to meet the demand of the growing videocassette recorder (VCR) market. In 1983, the sales of VCRs more than doubled from the previous year [14, p. 330]. Consequently, video distributors quickly needed to become more efficient at providing video stores with a sufficient number of film titles to keep on their shelves in order to meet the public's demand for new product [6, p. 261].

Beyond attempting to take advantage of the growth in the number of theaters and ancillary markets, early Latino filmmakers also benefited from Robert Redford's growing involvement in the American independent film movement. Prior to establishing the Sundance Film Festival and the Sundance Channel, he created the Sundance Film Institute in 1980 [5, p. 39]. The institute was an extremely important resource for

independent filmmakers. Beyond providing assistance to filmmakers in developing independently financed, low-budget films, it presented an invaluable forum for ethnic filmmakers whose films were being ignored by Hollywood studios [5, p. 39]. The Sundance Institute nurtured these film projects and helped bring them to fruition. Early Latino filmmakers and producers of *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* and *El Norte* took advantage of this institute to learn certain nuances of the film business, such as retaining creative control and film distribution. Both of these Latino films premiered at Telluride, another significant film festival that featured independent films.

The other champion in the development Latino film projects was Lindsay Law. He was the president of PBS' American Playhouse, a non-profit portion of PBS that provided production funds for projects like *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* and *El Norte*, which later were televised on the series. Prior to Law, film's that were funded by PBS typically did not secure a theatrical release. Despite the fact, *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* had been televised on PBS. Law supported Moctesuma Esparza's idea of theatrically releasing *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*. He ultimately enabled him to reach an agreement with PBS for a theatrical release of his film. This trend allowed the filmmakers of *El Norte* to secure a distribution deal prior to being televised on PBS.

The economics of the early 1980s also made it significantly easier to finance independent films like Latino independent cinema. The United States was in the midst of an economic resurgence. Upper and middle-class Americans profited from Reagan's Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 that cut taxes [15]. The impetus behind this tax cut was to encourage Americans to spend as well as invest. To persuade more investment,

the act sheltered income from taxation during the early years of a film's life [16]. Consequently, film producers could more easily locate individuals who were interested in financing films. Beyond the traditional means of raising capital through loans or grants, film producers could sell investors on the potential additional revenues of home video and pay television. The need for product created a "sellers market" that gave investors a sense of security as film producers often could pre-sell their motion pictures to home video companies, cable networks, and foreign territories [6, p. 264]. James Schamus (1998) contended that low budget films of this era were almost guaranteed handsome advances of least few hundred thousand dollars on video rights [17, p. 94].

Simultaneously, the Mexican film industry made an effort to take advantage of this growing independent film movement by circulating its films into U.S. art theaters and classic theaters [18]. They intended to produce and release a higher quality film. The target audience of these Mexican art films was supposed to be art film audiences, Spanish-speaking Latinos, and bilingual Latinos. However, the poor overall economic state of Mexico, which provided production funds to the film industry, undermined this venture [19]. The film industry consequently reverted to relying on cheap films with extremely low production values that were produced by independent filmmakers for its distribution pipeline [19].

Throughout the early 1980s, the distribution of Mexican films in the United States continued to generate lower box office grosses. The Mexican recession besieged the film industry and hurt the quality of their films and eventually the quantity of films being produced. The severe depression also began affecting Azteca Films, the distributor of

Mexican films throughout United States [20]. To exacerbate matters for this film distributor, many key independent producers in Mexico and the United States were no longer allowing Azteca Films to distribute their films in the United States [20]. These producers were angry that Azteca was not working closely with them when it came to distributing their films [20]. Azteca Films apparently did not notify these filmmakers when or where their films were being released in the U.S. This became especially problematic for these film producers who counted on the United States for nearly half of their revenue. Furthermore, they were upset that its films were earning dollars, but being paid in pesos [20]. They wanted to be paid in dollars, since the peso was losing much of its financial worth due to the economic troubles of the country [20]. Consequently, Mexican producers developed two different distribution companies, called American General Film Distribution Inc. and Mexcinema, in order to retain control of their films [20]. Both of these distribution companies became direct competitors of Azteca [20].

The other major Mexican distributor, Televicine, was a relative newcomer to U.S. distribution when it was crippled by the devaluation of the peso. This company had just recently purchased Columbia Pictures' Spanish-language film division and was planning to utilize these recently acquired U.S. owned-theaters to more aggressively promote and distribute Mexicans films [21]. Televicine was encouraged with its acquisition of these theaters, because it began to distribute Spanish-subtitled Disney films, a potentially lucrative client [22]. Prior to the distribution deal, Disney had not released its subtitled films in the United States [22]. Shortly afterwards, Columbia and Fox agreed to circulate their subtitled motion pictures through Televicine’s theaters [1]. However, Televicine

became overly reliant on the subtitling of Hollywood films which, as in the 1930s, was generally not popular with Spanish-speaking audiences [1, 20]. One of the reasons why it became overly dependent on American subtitled films was the lack of Mexican films being produced due to the depression. The depression also forced Televisa in Mexico, the corporate headquarters of Televicine, to put its U.S. operations on hold and sidetracked its initial strategy of expanding the number of prints being circulated throughout its U.S. theaters [20].

The lack of available screens in the United States also hindered the distribution of Mexican films. This problem was evident in Los Angeles and surrounding areas, which was Mexico's most important and lucrative market. The Metropolitan and Pacific Theaters were the two primary exhibitors in Southern California for Spanish-language product. Unfortunately, these chains were fairly small and could not accommodate all of the Spanish-language films in market [20]. To exacerbate matters, Spanish-language theaters had become obsolete and rundown, as theater owners did not invest money in renovating these screens or building multiplexes in order to make them attractive to their target audiences [23].

Mexican film distribution was also hurt by the upward mobility that was taking place among many U.S. Latinos. These Latinos began to move away from urban areas to the suburbs where few Spanish-language theaters exist [23]. Consequently, attendance at these Spanish-language theaters, especially outside of California, began to diminish as its customer base was reduced [23, 24]. For example, in Chicago, a vital Midwest market for Mexican films, five Spanish-speaking theaters were shut down in the early 1980s,

because fewer Latinos lived near downtown theaters [24]. Houston was another vital market that was slowly losing its theaters because of a bad economy that had hit the Latino community [24]. The Latinos in Houston not only stopped attending theaters, they left the city [24]. Evidently, Spanish-language exhibitors opted to not build theaters in the suburbs and follow its core audience.

While Spanish-language films were not doing well in key cities in the Midwest and the Southwest, Spanish-language film distribution was still a fairly lucrative business for Embassy Pictures on the East Coast. Embassy Pictures headed by Carlos Barba circulated *Esperado a Papa* (1981), which grossed $450,000 [20]. A Venezuelan film *Carmen la que contaba 16 anos* (1978) generated over $285,000 with only two prints [20]. This distributor also successfully released *Una Aventura Llamado Menudo* (1982), which grossed over $265,000 in a single New York City theater [20]. The film centered on Menudo, an extremely popular Puerto Rican teen band. The group's concerts corresponded with the film, which boosted attendance. Embassy Pictures planned similar strategy for the film in other cities like Miami [20].

Beyond falling box office revenues throughout most of the country, cable television channels such as, Galavision, began to replace Spanish-language theaters as it acquired film product to televise [25, 26]. Jack Valenti, the President of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), confidently predicted to Mexican President Miguel De La Madrid that Galavision's subscriber base would grow significantly, if the Mexican film industry could provide enough product for the U.S. Spanish-language market [27]. Another new competitor to Spanish-language theaters was the home video

industry. The Mexican film industry began to cultivate the U.S. Latino home video market. In 1984, it planned to sell packages of fifty video titles for $30 to $50 per title and distribute them to wholesalers throughout the U.S. [23]. The Mexican film industry ultimately hoped to take advantage of an estimated 1,500,000 to 3,000,000 VCRs in U.S. Latino households, which outnumbered the combined total of Mexico, Columbia, and Venezuela [28]. The Mexican film industry apparently perceived that the home video industry would ultimately replace film theaters. This theory led to the ultimate demise of Spanish-language film distribution industry in the United States.

The Promotion of Early 1980s U.S. Latino Films

As the distribution of Mexican films declined, several distributors began to release U.S. Latino films. With the exception of Universal's *Zoot Suit*, these motion pictures were financed and produced outside the studio system. These low-budget films generally attempted to target both art film and Latino audiences with limited promotional budgets. Perhaps, more importantly, they were attempting to develop a marketing template for a movie-going audience that had always been considered a secondary market within the United States. The purpose of this quick summary is to examine what audiences these various distributors of independent U.S. Latino films targeted and the box office performances of these motion pictures.

Monarex promoted *Heartbreaker* (1983), a motion picture that focuses on Beto (Fernando Allende), a customized car club leader who is simultaneously trying to discover who is responsible for blowing up one of his club's customized vehicles and to pursue a relationship with Kim (Dawn Dunlap), a beautiful blonde [29]. The distributor

attempted to take advantage of the popularity of Fernando Allende, a Latin American heartthrob, in his first English-language film, as well as the car culture of the Southwest with this $1 million film [30]. Despite the fact the film takes place in East Los Angeles, it attempts to avoid the Latino label by featuring a diverse cast of little known actors [31]. The distributor tried to target young urban moviegoers, car aficionados, and Spanish-speaking females who were fans of Fernando Allende. The distributor apparently did not spend a great deal of money in prints and advertising, since *Heartbreaker* was not released in many markets or circulated on many screens. The motion picture debuted on nine screens in May and grossed $64,000 [29]. During its second week, the film earned $43,000 on six screens. *Heartbreaker* earned a little more than $100,000 in a two-week theatrical run.

In 1985, Cinecom attempted to market and release the controversial *Latino*. This motion picture revolves around Eddie Guerrero (Robert Beltran), a Latino Green Beret sent to the Honduran-Nicaraguan border to train contra forces [32]. He becomes conflicted about his mission when he falls in love with a Nicaraguan woman (Annette Cardona), whose family is fighting on the enemy side. This film was a hit on the film festival circuit and was eagerly acquired by foreign distributors; but Hollywood studios were not enthusiastic about the film. A major U.S. distributor did not pick up *Latino*. Perhaps, the film's controversial subject matter scared away both mainstream and specialty distributors [33]. In addition, the motion picture's marketability was hampered by the lack of a notable Hollywood star. Robert Beltran, the star of the film, was a relatively unknown actor. After originally not acquiring the film at the Cannes Film

Festival finally, Cinecom decided to pick up the film [34]. The distributor was convinced to obtain the rights to *Latino* by George Lucas, who was a close personal friend of the director Haskell Wexler and a strong advocate of the film [34].

Unlike many traditional art films, *Latino* initially was not premiered in New York, because Cinecom was not certain that the film would receive positive reviews from this newspaper [33]. Instead, the distributor debuted the motion picture in Los Angeles, Chicago, and San Francisco [35]. Despite the fact that the film was in English and Spanish and was featured in heavily populated Latino cities, the motion picture did not perform well in these cities. Cinecom proceeded to implement the strategy of releasing the film for two weeks in the larger cities and one week in the smaller markets to maximize its box-office results [34]. Though box office did improve, the film did not produce a large sum of revenue. The final box office of the film is unclear, because it was received very limited distribution. Based on *Variety's* individual market-to-market box office figures, I estimated the box office of the film to be around $50,000. The film was a huge financial failure for Wexler and his mother, who spent $4 million to produce *Latino* [34].

Miramax's first venture into the U.S. Latino market began in 1985 with *Crossover Dreams*, a film about Rudy Veloz (Ruben Blades), a talented Panamanian-born salsa singer's quest to crossover from the local Spanish-language market to the mainstream market at all costs [36]. The film received favorable reviews at New Directors/New Films series at the Museum of Modern Art [37]. The distributor felt that *Crossover Dreams* was a motion picture that potentially appealed to assimilated Latinos and young

music fans [36]. Miramax planned to release the film in the top 20 art film markets [37]. It produced Spanish subtitles for Puerto Rico and Latino territories [37]. Ruben Blades, the popular musicians, planned to promote and create a "buzz" for the motion picture through public appearances [37].

In spite of the star power of Blades, the film did not resonate with assimilated Latinos, young music fans, or art film audiences. The film did fairly well in a single New York City theater. This is not surprising since Ruben Blades, the star of the film, resides in the city. He is an extremely popular musician with a large New York City fan base. However, the film did not fare as well in other markets. The motion picture received little distribution. At it broadest point, *Crossover Dreams* was only screened in five cities and on eight screens. According to *Variety*, the film grossed $240, 311 over a seven-week period.

In summary, *Heartbreaker*, *Latino*, and *Crossover Dreams* were not successful in producing significant box-office grosses. Each distributor implemented a different strategy to attract a sizeable Latino or art film audience. Each distributor appeared to have extremely limited marketing budgets and did not produce many prints for theatrical release. Monarex centered much of their publicity campaign on the star power of a Mexican Fernando Allende and customized cars to appeal to Spanish-speaking and English-language audiences. However, the Spanish-language audience apparently was not interested watching this Mexican star in an English-language film and English-language moviegoers were not attracted to the low rider culture of the Southwest. Cinecom's *Latino* was promoted as an art film and appeared to avoid the Latino label in

order to resonate with the broadest possible audience. But this film did not possess many marketable elements like a high profile star and did not attract a large audience to theaters. Lastly, Miramax's *Crossover Dreams* publicity campaign focused on the popular musician Ruben Blades. The distributor targeted Latino audiences with Spanish subtitles. But the musical theme did not resonate with art film or Latino audiences. One trend was becoming apparent for U.S. Latino film projects: Latino and art film audiences did not respond to low-budget independent films that featured a Spanish-language celebrity.

Case Studies

The following four case studies involve four low-budget films: one studio film and three independent films. Each of the films was produced from between $1.3 -$2.5 million. *Zoot Suit* was developed within the studio system. However, it had an extremely low budget of about $2.5 million. The film was not a typical Hollywood motion picture, since the film's director Luis Valdez integrated stage with film to develop a film-play. The other three independent films overcame a variety of obstacles ranging from lack of production funds to not being able to secure a Hollywood distributor, before finally being released.

During the marketing process, these distributors took a different strategy in order to promote their films to both mainstream and Latino audiences. Universal's *Zoot Suit* campaign primarily targeted Mexican-Americans and other Latino groups. The studio did a great deal of research prior to releasing the film. In contrast, Island/Cinecom initially focused on promoting *El Norte* to art film audiences prior to targeting Latino

audiences, because it wanted to create awareness with East Coast critics and audiences initially. Embassy Pictures opted to attempt to take advantage of an aggressive grassroots publicity campaign for *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* that paid special attention to Latinos, before targeting art film audiences. Embassy also had to overcome the fact that the film was televised first on PBS.

The last case study of this chapter is *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. This is the first hybrid U.S. Latino film in my study. In direct contrast to all of the three promotional campaigns above, Island Alive never did promote *Kiss of the Spider Woman* as a Latino film. The motion picture had strong Latino elements such as, director, a majority of the talent, and location of the story, but the distributor opted for a different promotional strategy. These various promotional campaigns represented initial efforts by distributors to develop a successful promotional template for this particular niche market.

Zoot Suit

Zoot Suit was based loosely on the infamous Sleepy Lagoon Murder Mystery in 1942, when over 600 Mexican Americans were arrested in Los Angeles [38]. The film centers on Henry Reyna (Daniel Valdez), one of the wrongly convicted pachucos, and his alter ego El Pachuco (Edward James Olmos). Prior to being developed as a motion picture, *Zoot Suit* was a popular Los Angeles play. The principal figure of the play, Edward James Olmos, was one of the co-stars of the film. Olmos recently had been one of the supporting actors in *Wolfen* (1981). This would be the first time that he was one of the featured stars.

The other marketable talent was the charismatic Luis Valdez, who would be

directing his first feature film. However, his creative origins began with the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s, so he was not going to be well known to a broad audience. He was a playwright with the El Teatro Campesino, which became affiliated with the United Farm Workers union of Cesar Chavez [39]. Prior to becoming known a well-known theater group, El Teatro Campesino played an essential role of entertaining and educating striking farm workers in California's Central Valley through short plays. The other purpose of the theater company was to create public awareness on both the grape boycott and the plight of the striking farm workers, who struggled to improve their way of life [40]. Beyond entertaining and raising awareness, El Teatro Campesino tried to raise much needed money to assist striking workers as well as continuing its grape boycott. While both Valdez and Olmos were relatively popular among the Mexican-American community, they were not highly marketable stars outside of the Southwest.

Nevertheless, Ned Tanen, the president of the Universal's motion picture division, felt *Zoot Suit* could be an effective vehicle to reach Latino audiences, especially Spanish-speakers [41]. This film symbolized Hollywood's initial attempt to produce highly targeted Latino programming in the United States (Thom Mount, personal communication, July 18, 2003). Thom Mount, the former president of Universal, was also excited about developing a unique promotional campaign for the Latino community and the Spanish-speaking community in the U.S. (personal communication, July 18, 2003). Universal's initial marketing plan was to develop audience momentum in California [42]. After cultivating an audience in California, Universal planned to target heavily populated Latino cities in the Southwest such as, Phoenix, Las Vegas, and larger

cities in Texas [42]. Another potential audience for the film could potentially be fans of the play and perhaps other ethnic communities [43]. Nevertheless, Universal executives were hopeful that the film would cross over to other mainstream markets [44].

Universal proceeded to hire San Antonio-based Sosa & Associates to assist it in attracting Latinos moviegoers. According to Ernest Bromley, Universal wanted us to do a pretty extensive research project to determine how playable a film about East LA Pachuco gangs would be within different Latino ethnic groups. The distributor wanted to get a sense of what their likes and dislikes would be and how we would position the film within these populations. Bromley states why Universal was nervous about producing the film (personal communication, October 1, 2002).

> You have to remember that the film was originally a play and it was very popular in Los Angeles, but then it went to New York and it bombed. The history it had outside of California had them a little worried. We went out and did focus groups. We did them in Chicago, New York, Miami, San Antonio, and some in LA. It was pretty extensive. We found that there was interest. However, there was very little awareness of Chicano history, outside the LA market, related to L.A.

According to Lionel Sosa, they developed two target groups (personal communication, October 4, 2002). These two groups were younger Latinos between the ages of 15 to 21, which tended to be a heavy moviegoing audience, and older Latinos. The results of the focus groups were not promising for the marketability of *Zoot Suit*. Sosa described the general feeling of these Latinos (personal communication, October 4, 2002).

> We found that Latinos really did not want a movie like that. They did not react well to another film about Pachucos. Wherever we did focus groups it became apparent that the regular moviegoer was not going to embrace this film.

The results of these focus groups allowed the marketers of *Zoot Suit* to develop these five hypotheses about Latinos [42].

1) The geographic location and sub-group identity of Latinos are more important advertising variables than acculturation and age.
2) Strong family audience orientation characterizes Latino working class movie consumption.
3) Latinos are heavy consumers of English-language television.
4) Latinos reacted favorably when they discovered a Latino filmmaker directed a motion picture, even when they had never heard of Luis Valdez.
5) They also discovered that word of mouth builds slower in the Latino community than mainstream communities.

After *Zoot Suit* was produced, Universal hired a group of East Los Angeles artists to create visual material to assist in the advertising of the film (T. Mount, personal communication, July 8, 2003). The studio ran a dual general market and Spanish-language advertising campaign. It represented the first time that Universal had split a Spanish-language promotion from a general market plan. The material produced to promote the film was printed bilingually (T. Mount, personal communication, July 18, 2003). Thom Mount describes how the film was uniquely designed to resonate with each U.S. Latino group (personal communication, July 18, 2003).

> We also put up billboards, which they created. We marketed the picture both in radio, television, and print campaigns differently in a number of different cities relative to that indigenous Spanish-speaking population. We had a different campaign for Miami for the Cuban population. We had a campaign in New York for the Nuyoricans campaign. We had a different campaign from LA to the Mississippi and also Chicago, which as a huge Mexican population.

Universal gave Sosa and Bromley about $300,000 to market the film (L. Sosa, personal communication, October 4, 2002). They developed an almost exclusive Spanish-language television and radio marketing campaign. However, Luis Reyes stated that *Zoot Suit's* Spanish-language advertising was not that effective, because the recent Mexican-American immigrants, Salvadorans, or the recent immigrants that came here had no clue what the Pachuco was or understood Chicanismo of the 1940s. Sosa & Associates produced 12 different radio commercials targeting different Latino subgroups and acculturation [42]. They consequently hired Edward James Olmos to produce radio ads for the film. Sosa & Associates also tested six poster concepts and four television commercials [42].

Sosa asserted that they centered much of their advertising on Texas, since it had a large number of Mexican-Americans in the state. They did not market the film in California, because it already had a built-in audience (L. Sosa, personal communication, October 4, 2002). They attempted to promote the film by trying to explain the events that led to the Zoot Suit Riots. Furthermore, they made an effort to build the credibility of Luis Valdez, "as a person who knew this history as well as a writer and director of great integrity" (L. Sosa, personal communication, October 4, 2002). Sosa stated that the primary challenge of the film's promotion campaign was, "that the film has potential appeal to all age groups, all acculturation levels, and all Hispanic subgroups" [42].

Beyond a Spanish-language and general market campaign, Universal implemented a grassroots campaign to build a word of mouth within the Latino community. However, Luis Reyes illustrates the difficulty of building a word-of-mouth

campaign for *Zoot Suit* through a grassroots marketing campaign outside of Southern California (personal communication, March 1, 2003).

> We did a lot of grassroots marketing done within the Chicano community, especially among the people who came to see the play. They were brought into a whole network (in Los Angeles). But outside of LA, people did not get it or get into it… Outside of Los Angeles, it was a hard sell.

Universal circulated *Zoot Suit* in a manner similar to a low-budget independent film. The film did not receive wide distribution. Universal released the film on a territory-by-territory basis [42]. Sosa says, "It only ran in Mexican American markets. It ran in Chicago, all of Texas and California" (L. Sosa, personal communication, October 4, 2002). The film was also released in New Mexico and Colorado [45].

Prior to its debut, the *Zoot Suit* received an excellent review from *Variety*. The film premiered in Los Angeles on a single screen in October and earned a box office gross of $80,000. Universal slowly expanded its run to three Southern California cities and three screens for next five weeks. *Zoot Suit* performed well in these cities. The film's per- screen average varied from a second-week high of $35,033 to a low of $15,666 on its fifth week. On the seventh week of its run, *Zoot Suit* was expanded to six cities and six screens; it averaged of $10,750 per screen. For the next few weeks, the number of cities that screened the film fluctuated between four and six, and the number of screens oscillated between four and eight. The film continued to perform well in these markets and its per- screen average continued to be over $5,000. On the 12th week, Universal reduced its number of cities to three, but expanded the number of screens to nine. The per-screen average of $1,469 indicated that the film was beginning to lose its legs. For the remainder of its theatrical run, *Zoot Suit* was screened in one or two

markets and between 5 to 8 screens. The film's per-screen average rebounded strongly to over $5,000. On the final week of its run, it was showcased on 30 screens with a per-screen average of $1,633. The final box office gross was estimated at $3.2 million over a theatrical run of 17 weeks. Even though *Zoot Suit's* box office gross exceeded its production cost, this motion picture was not a highly profitable venture for Universal, since distributors only collect about 50% of a film's box office gross from exhibitors (film rental).

The film's limited release suggested that *Zoot Suit* did not crossover to a mainstream audience. Conceivably, the motion picture's difficult subject matter and the fact that it was one of the first movies with a Mexican American cast and about a Mexican American historical incident may have compelled Universal to focus on the Mexican-American cities and not circulate this film to non-Latino cities. Bromley suggest that *Zoot Suit* was ahead of its time and mainstream America was not ready for the film (E. Bromley, personal communication, October 1, 2002). Consequently, it appears that the film advertisers' advice may have convinced Universal that *Zoot Suit* would not develop legs in these mainstream markets. Universal's limited release pattern did not allow *Zoot Suit* to pick up a positive word of mouth among mainstream audiences, which is vital for any film, especially for a low-budget feature with a limited advertising budget. It does not appear that Universal circulated *Zoot Suit* outside the southwest region, with the exception of Chicago and New York City. But, the film was quickly pulled from New York's theaters, because it performed so badly at the box office.

Zoot Suit's lack of success on the East Coast was strikingly similar to what occurred to the stage play. The play was a hit on the West Coast, but it did not perform well on Broadway. Similarly, according to the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, the film did not resonate with New York City audiences. The film earned only $31,500 on 22 screens or a per screen average of a little above $1,000. The film apparently did not appeal to Puerto Ricans living in New York City. Conceivably, the extremely negative movie review that *Zoot Suit* received from *The New York Times* certainly did not help the film on the East Coast. The newspaper's critic Vincent Canby described the film as "a holy mess of a film, full or earnest, serious intentions and virtually no achievements" [46]. This negative review may have discouraged potential East Coast Latinos or art film audiences from attending the film. Lionel Sosa contends that the film performed poorly in New York City, because most Puerto Ricans do not attend the theater, so they were not familiar with the play. "They also do not identify with Mexican Americans" (L. Sosa, personal communication, October 4, 2002). More importantly, Sosa believes that Latinos twenty years ago did not want to see any more negative representation of their ethnic group and they perceived the Pachuco to be a negative (L. Sosa, personal communication, October 4, 2002). Consequently, the film did not receive a great deal of support from individuals outside of Los Angeles.

The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez

The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez chronicles one of the most famous manhunts in the history of the United States. The film centers on Gregorio Cortez (Edward James Olmos) who becomes a fugitive after shooting a Texas sheriff over a linguistic misunderstanding.

This film was the first project produced by American Playhouse [47]. Although the motion picture was financed to be a made-for-tv film, the contracts negotiated with production guilds by the producers required that the motion picture premiere theatrically before its PBS airing [48, p. 251]. To honor its contract with these various guilds, Olmos organized the film's debut in San Antonio, Texas, by four-walling a single theater in June 1982 [6, p. 8-9]. He rented the theater with money contributed by the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) and Moctesuma Esparza [6, p. 8-9]. A few weeks later, the film was screened at the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington D.C. [49, p. 157].

Similar to *Alambrista*, *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* had a difficult time securing a distribution deal from a Hollywood studio or a classics division, because the film was televised on PBS [50]. Hollywood distributors typically avoid acquiring made-for-tv films. James C. Katz, who ran Universal's classic division, explains why his company does not pick up films like *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*. He states, "once a movie airs on public TV, you start exhausting the audience for classic films." In addition, outside of Edward James Olmos, the film did not have any highly commercial stars. Despite not being acquired by a Hollywood distributor, the producers and the cast of the film were convinced this film had theatrical box office potential. In particular, Edward James Olmos began a grassroots marketing campaign [51]. He first became aware of this grassroots marketing technique by attending a workshop conducted by Jeff Dowd, who worked with Seven Gables Theatre in Seattle. He worked with this exhibitor, which had done some really innovative “grassroots” marketing campaigns in their community for their films (Bob Hoffman, personal communication, March 4, 2003).

According to Danny Haro, part of Olmos' marketing strategy was to build a word of mouth by giving the film away for free. Haro describes Olmos' formula for success (personal communication, March 29, 2003).

> Our strategy I think was if 15% of the population in the city saw the film for free that would guarantee success at the box office. We would create opinion maker screenings. For example, prior to the opening, we had 7 to 10 screenings of the film for free. We would target our audiences to people in leadership positions who could spread the word.

Olmos personally spent the next year implementing this strategy by promoting this film throughout the country to various community and business groups [52]. He went so far as to personally organize free screenings throughout the United States [53]. He claimed to have exhibited the film to 70,000 people to generate a word-of-mouth campaign within the Latino community [52]. The free screenings were extremely successful in Los Angeles and the film received positive reviews from the *Los Angeles Times* and *LA Weekly* [54, p. 252]. The positive word-of-mouth campaign convinced Norman Lear and Jerry Perenchino of Embassy Pictures to watch and acquire the film [47].

Embassy Pictures implemented an interesting marketing strategy. First, it hired the Cortez group (Edward James Olmos, Robert Hoffman, Moctesuma Esparza, Tom Bower) and four field representatives to join its marketing team [6, p. 10]. The distributor encouraged the group to continue its effective grassroots marketing strategy, because Embassy did not have field representatives (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003). Consequently, the distributor relied on the recently hired Cortez group to develop a word-of-mouth for the film (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003). Simultaneously, Embassy provided contacts with exhibitors and the press.

Michele Reese, head of field promotion, was an advocate of grassroots marketing was especially helpful to their marketing campaign [48, p. 13]. Unfortunately, Avco acquired Embassy Pictures, just as the Cortez group was being hired to join its marketing team [54, p. 252]. After significant restructuring, Norman Lear left the movie division for the television division [54, p. 252]. Furthermore, the Latino division, he developed was eliminated [54, p. 252]. In spite of these changes in management, Avco continued to support the group [6, p. 11].

The Cortez group's original goal was to generate as much grassroots publicity in the top 40 markets within an eight-month window [6, p. 11]. However, Embassy put a stop to the Cortez group's grassroots marketing plan and decided to distribute the film in a more traditional manner. Embassy and the Cortez group did not agree on how to release this motion picture. Embassy proposed to release the film in New York City and Los Angeles, which is traditional for many art films [54, p. 253]. After debuting in these two cities, it planned to expand its release to ten markets over the next four weeks [6, p. 14]. On the other hand, the Cortez group wanted the film to be released in a slower and more regional pattern [54, p. 252].

Embassy Pictures finally decided to release the film in two cities: El Paso, a predominately Spanish-speaking city, and San Francisco, an art film city [54, p. 252]. It would also provide a good indication of how these two very different markets would react to the film. The distributor apparently utilized a dual marketing strategy designed to attract both Latino and art film audiences [52]. *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* debuted in San Francisco [30]. The distributor attempted to utilize the film's critical acclaim to

garner interest with independent film audiences and critics in other cities [30, 52]. The film was a hit with San Francisco's moviegoers. According to Bob Hoffman, the film made nearly $500,000 in this market (personal communication, March 4, 2003). He described the San Francisco run as a success, because the city had a large number of literate moviegoers.

After its San Francisco run, Embassy planned to launch the film in El Paso. Danny Haro spent seven or eight weeks prior to the premiere (personal communication, March 29, 2003). For each of those weeks he conducted at least two screenings and made appearances at different organizations. Haro talked about the film and what they were trying to do in Hollywood. He galvanized audiences by telling them that, "If you want [Latino] programming, you are going to have to take it into our own hands in an attempt to show Hollywood that there could be a market" (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003). He stood outside the theater passing out flyers. Haro also introduced the film and at the end he would conduct a Question & Answer (Q & A). Haro stated that Olmos' marketing paid off, as it was the second largest grossing film in El Paso for the summer [55 & D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003. Furthermore, the distributor's Spanish-language prints were a hit with El Paso's moviegoers [54, p. 254].

After receiving positive results in these two markets, Embassy decided to release the film nationwide [54, p. 254]. It wanted to expand its dual release pattern. The Cortez group did not agree with this strategy. They cited grassroots marketing efforts as the reason why this film performed well in these markets [54, p. 254]. Danny Haro, a

producer and Director of Community Affairs for Olmos Production, contended that with a film like Cortez, "you needed to build the film's anticipation" [55]. Haro believed that they did not have the people power to market a film in several cities simultaneously. Despite the group's reservations, they arranged speaking engagements in the top ten markets that the film was premiering in and made an effort to interest important film critics within each of these cities [6, p. 13]. Regrettably, the Cortez group was correct. Despite the fact that, Embassy spent $1 million in marketing; *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* did not perform well [54, p. 254]. Due to the distributor's lack of patience, the film did not benefit from a good review from *The New York Times*. Embassy had a difficult time securing screens in the extremely competitive New York City art film market [6, p. 16-17]. It also did not give the Cortez Group enough time to effectively promote the film. For example, after spending seven weeks in El Paso and a month in San Francisco, they were only given two weeks to implement a grassroots marketing campaign in New York. The distributor did not really support us in New York City with much advertising assistance. They may have only done a few print ads and a maybe couple of radio spots (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003). In Boston, the film had a tough time drawing interest from either exhibitors or critics.

Even in Latino markets, where advertisements accentuated Latino themes, the film only had mixed business [52]. In Los Angeles, *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* debuted in Mann's Fine Arts Theater, but it was not released near a Chicano neighborhood. Apparently, Pacific and Metropolitan, the local Spanish-language exhibition chains demanded too much money from the Embassy, so the film was not

screened in these venues [6, p. 17]. The film also was not advertised heavily in *La Opinion*, the community Spanish-language paper with a large number of Spanish-speaking readers. Lastly, the film was not reviewed by *Variety*, which most certainly could have attracted additional moviegoers. Consequently, the film did not receive much Spanish-language press coverage nor was it screened in Spanish-language theaters in the largest Spanish-speaking market in the United States. In another Texas market, the film was booked into the wrong theater and without a grassroots publicity campaign [6, p. 17-18]. Ironically, with the exception of San Diego and El Paso, the film was not well received in the communities closest to the U.S. - Mexico border [6, p. 18]. The distributor became discouraged by the lack of returns and they pulled the film after three months [54, p. 254].

Moctesuma Esparza stated *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* made a great deal of its box office in three markets -- Los Angeles, El Paso, and San Francisco. He estimated that the film made about $800,000 in these markets. Esparza asserted that, in these three cities, Embassy took advantage of the fact that the film was critically accepted and its effective grassroots marketing campaign. He stated that the film was "on a significant number of critics' top ten lists for the year. In addition, we had Eddie Olmos standing in front of the theater and other members of the cast in each of those three cities in a grassroots marketing campaign" (M. Esparza, personal communication, August, 13, 2002).

Despite its grassroots marketing campaign and critical acclaim, the film's 12-week run was very sporadic. During its first two weeks, *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*

appeared in one city and on one screen in August. It performed fairly well earning $20,000. However, it did not make *Variety's* 50 Top Grossing Films for the next three weeks. For the next six weeks, the film struggled to find an audience. Its broadest release reached only 6 cities and 6 screens. Its highest weekly box office total was only $42,000 on five screens. The film ultimately earned only $805,000 in box office grosses.

In spite of these numerous setbacks mentioned above, Cortez group did not lose faith in the film. They felt the film could be successfully distributed if they had stuck to their original plan of marketing the film through a grassroots campaign. Through a sub-distribution deal with Embassy, the group regained distribution rights to the film. After implementing a tremendous word of mouth campaign through its screening in local film festivals, *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* had its most successful run in Denver [48, p. 18]. The group generated an additional $100,000 in film grosses to boost its box office total to about $909,000. *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* was a box office disappointment, because the motion picture did not quite recoup its production costs of $1.1 million.

El Norte

El Norte follows the long journey of two Guatemalan immigrants, Enrique (David Villalpando) and Rosa (Zaide Silvia Gutierrez), who flee their village and come to the United States in search of a better life, after government soldiers kill their parents. Cinecom International and Island Alive developed a joint venture for distributing this predominantly Spanish-speaking film. Similar to *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, they developed a dual marketing strategy for two different types of audiences. First, they wanted to attract art film and Latino audiences. These two audiences were split into four

subdivisions and the distributors developed a profile of each of these audiences [56, p. 67]. The audience segments were the following: art house moviegoers; middle-class Latino adults -- the opinion leaders of the community; Anglo or Latino individuals in small towns; and Spanish-speaking audiences [54, p. 256]. In order to facilitate the complicated task of attracting these diverse audiences, the distributors produced subtitled Spanish and English-language prints [30]. The distributors concluded that a positive word of mouth campaign built on positive mainstream and Spanish-language press reviews was necessary to attract these diverse audiences [6, p. 68]. Gregory Nava, the director of the film, asserted that positive reviews within the English-language newspapers would be essential in garnering support within the Spanish-language press, since this media tends to follow the lead of the mainstream press [6, p. 69].

However, the important decision that was made by the filmmakers and the distributors was to open the film on the East Coast. Nava did not want the film to become politicized, since immigration was a hot topic on the West Coast [54, p. 255]. The filmmaker's attempt to avoid controversy was one of the primary factors in debuting *El Norte* on the East Coast. Co-Writer Anna Thomas goes into more detail on how the political climate on the West Coast influenced their decision to premiere *El Norte* away on the East Coast (personal communication, June 18, 2003).

> It seems obvious that we market it first in the Southwest and let it go from here. But we decided it was the wrong thing to do and for those exact reasons, because it was such a hot button issue in the Southwest. It was such a hot button issue in California. Everybody had an axe to grind about it. Everybody had an agenda. Other than is this a good movie or not. We did not want it to start out in an atmosphere of people using it for their own personal political agendas. Whatever that might be, whether they are against this or for that or down the middle. But we did not want it to be

> principally used as something that was being discussed as a political film or about a political issue or a social issue film. We did not want it to be identified that way. We wanted it to be identified, as a great story, a wonderful film, and an emotional experience in a theater.

According to Anna Thomas, there were two additional reasons why the motion picture did not debut on the West Coast. First, they did not feel that the Latino market was strong enough to initially carry the film (A. Thomas, personal communication, June 18, 2003).

> It [the Latino community] was sort of insecure in itself and not ready to lead the parade on something and say this is a great film and the rest of the country better follow us. Now that is shifting, as the Latino market, starts to feel its muscle and starts to realize its importance and starts to realize its taste is influencing everything else. Then, there was much more a sense of insecurity culturally in the community.

Second, they felt that the most important critics for their film were on the East Coast.

> If you can get the *The New York Times*, if you can get the big Eastern papers and magazines, we would have the cutting edge, critical opinion on your side. The ones that really counted! Critics love to discover something and feel like they are the ones that found it and they were the first ones to see it. So you did not want to have West Coast critics telling East Coast critics what to think about something.

The film did not have a marketable American star -- both David Villapando and Zaide Silvia Gutierrez were Mexican actors making their first film – and so Anna Thomas and Gregory Nava flew all over the country promoting the motion picture. They conducted numerous interviews with numerous newspapers and radio stations for several months. The interviews ranged from their film getting stolen, getting their film back from the robbers, to a variety of other issues. More importantly, these interviews provided a great deal of free press for *El Norte*. Anna Thomas describes the importance

of free publicity to the ultimate success for an independent film (personal communication, June, 18, 2003).

> There were never full-page ads in the papers. You cannot have that for an independent film like this. You have to have good free publicity. You have to have good articles in the paper. You have to have them on your side. They have to be willing to run your pictures for your film and not some other film. Then, you start getting people in. Then, word of mouth can take over, if you have a good movie.

Originally, *El Norte* was scheduled to open simultaneously in New York and Chicago [56, p. 71]. However, Cinecom/Island Alive had a difficult time securing a screen in New York City [56, p. 71]. The distributor went ahead with the Chicago premiere at Fine Arts Theater in late December [56, p. 71]. Chicago was selected an ideal city for its debut, because it could take advantage of the strong support from the influential movie critic Roger Ebert, who championed the film [56, p. 71]. In addition, Chicago had a large and diverse Latino population that included Mexicans, Central Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans. The opening would be a good barometer to see how these various Latino audiences as well as art film audiences would respond to *El Norte* [56, p. 71].

Despite a cold front that gripped Chicago, *El Norte* performed relatively well at the box office and ran for fourteen weeks at the Fine Arts Theater. Although the film was a success in Chicago, it still encountered a difficult time securing a screen at New York City's Plaza Theater, because larger distributors would not vacate a screen for this smaller distributor. In early January, *El Norte* ultimately debuted at Walter Reade Baronet Theater, which was a smaller theater [56, p. 73]. Nevertheless, New York City was an important city for the distributors, because a good movie review from New York-based

media was an essential element for a national release of an art film. That is exactly what they received from influential movie critic Janet Maslin from *The New York Times* (A. Thomas, personal communication, June 18, 2003). In addition, *The New York Times* really embraced the film as they wrote a couple more stories on the motion picture. After receiving positive reviews from the highly influential *The New York Times*, Cinecom/Island Alive slowly expanded the circulation of the film throughout the New York and New Jersey area through its effective use of English and Spanish-language newspapers. *El Norte* ran for over four months in the New York area [56, p. 73].

After successful runs throughout the East Coast and Midwest, *El Norte* took the West Coast by storm. California was a successful market for *El Norte*. The film premiered at the Music Hall Theater, an art house theater in Beverly Hills [57]. The film ran for 19 straight weeks at this locale. It attracted a rich mix of Anglo art film moviegoers, English-speaking and Spanish-speaking Latino audiences. After its initial run that tended to target mainstream audiences and middle-class Latinos, Cinecom began to target heavily populated Latino areas throughout the U.S. [58]. The distributors began to secure screens on Latino film theaters and provided them with Spanish subtitled prints [58]. Furthermore, Cinecom developed a different trailer and advertising campaign with the assistance of Metropolitan Theaters to attract more Spanish-speaking Latinos [58]. The trailer most likely needed to be altered because it targeted art film audiences and not Spanish-language moviegoers, who generally are more accustomed to watching action-oriented motion pictures. The new advertising campaign encompassed pre-screenings for community leaders, local Spanish-language television and radio campaigns [57].

Cinecom implemented similar Spanish-language campaigns in Texas, Miami, Chicago, and New York [57]. For instances, in New York City, the distributor advertised film on *El Diario* and on Spanish-language radio stations WJIT and WADO [59].

Another reason for the success of the film was that it was embraced by a conservative newspaper such as the *Washington Post*, which enabled it to develop "legs" in Washington D.C. This support even surprised the distributor, which initially had postponed releasing the film in this particular market, because they feared negative reviews from a pro-Reagan press [6, p. 74]. While the film performed surprisingly well in some of these non-target markets, other markets were not receptive to *El Norte*. The film performed poorly in Miami and Minneapolis [6, p. 74]. The Cuban-American population of Miami did not respond well to the film. Apparently, these middle-class Cubans did embrace a film about Guatemalan immigrants [6, p. 74]. In Minneapolis, an influential local movie critic, whose film reviews attract the city's art film audiences, never championed *El Norte* [6, p. 74]. Consequently, the film did mediocre business, because it was not able to develop a "buzz."

Overall the marketing of *El Norte* was considered quite a success for a film that predominantly was in Spanish. The motion picture was circulated slowly throughout the country. According to *Variety*, the distributor screened the film on only one screen for its initial four weeks. During the 15th week, *El Norte* reached a high of 14 screens. It ultimately had a run of over 32 weeks and earned $5.5 million at the box office. This figure represents the highest grossing foreign language film by an American director and

most likely earned the distributor a healthy profit, because the film cost about $800,000 to produce.

Island Alive/Cinecom implemented an unusual distribution strategy for *El Norte*. It premiered the film in Chicago, prior to be released in New York City or Los Angeles. Despite the fact, the West Coast had a large number of Spanish-speaking people. Island Alive/Cinecom waited to circulate the film in this region. However, the anticipation built by an excellent word-of-mouth campaign for *El Norte* developed a great deal of buzz within art film audiences and the Latino community on the West Coast.

Furthermore, the distributor developed two marketing strategies. It promoted *El Norte* as an art film as opposed to a political film. After successfully distributing the film in Chicago and the East Coast, the distributors tailored a marketing strategy specifically for Spanish-speaking audiences in the Southwest. Part of this marketing campaigned centered around the controversy surrounding immigration; which attracted a large number of Latinos [60]. A vital element to the success of this film's marketing campaign was that it developed an audience of art film moviegoers through East Coast critics before it attempted to attract Latino audiences, who were not their initial core audience (A. Thomas, personal communication, June 18, 2003). After its success with art film audiences, the distributor worked closely with Metropolitan and Pacific Theaters in developing advertisements that would entice Spanish-speaking audiences in hopes to exploit this secondary market. It also released prints to these theaters that catered to Spanish-speaking Latinos.

Kiss of the Spider Woman

Kiss of the Spider Woman centers around two prisoners Luis Molina (William Hurt), a romantic homosexual, and Valentin Arregui (Raul Julia), a political activist, who share cell in a South American penitentiary. Hector Babenco, the film's director, spent four and half years of his life producing this motion picture [61]. He was able to raise a little more than a million dollars from American and Brazilian investors [61]. Island Alive acquired the motion picture for about $1.5 million. Prior to releasing *Kiss of the Spider Woman,* Island Alive typically marketed low-budget art films and never had more than 80 prints in circulation [62]. In this particular case, Island Alive planned to spend about one million dollars to aggressively publicize the film's launching. The marketers intended to utilize the film stars William Hurt and Raul Julia as well as director Hector Babenco to promote the film through public appearances [63]. William Hurt, who co-starred in *Body Heat* (1981) and *The Big Chill* (1983), provided the film with crossover potential. Publicist Harry Clein describes how the distributor planned to market a film with a little-known cast outside of William Hurt (personal communication, May, 21, 2003).

> Sonia Braga was a name on the art house circuit. Hector Babenco was a name on the art house circuit. Raul Julia was a name in theater. Bill Hurt was the only movie person. So, we pushed the image (of the Spider Woman).

Another problem that the producers of the film encountered was trying to make the film appealing to a wide audience, since it contained some homosexual scenes. Harry Clein states how they attempted to circumvent this dilemma (personal communication, May 21, 2003).

> Part of the fight, was how can we not ghettoize it as a gay film? In the same sense, we did not try to emphasize it (Latino-theme). This is a compelling drama, a story of a relationship. We were also trying to make sure that people did not think of it just as a prison film. What we were trying to do was to say that this is a compelling drama – an unusually compelling drama. I think one of things we were trying to emphasize was *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* aspect.

The distributor released the film via a platform strategy involving opening the film in one or a few theaters in a couple of key cities, with the intent to build good word of mouth among audiences and the press, then widening its circulation of prints, usually in phases [64, p. 2]. It planned to premiere the motion picture in three to five markets in early August [65]. Within a month, Island Alive expected to expand its scope to anywhere from 30 to 50 markets [65]. By the fall, Island Alive believed it would circulate this film on 250 to 300 screens [62]. The distributor also had such high hopes for *Kiss of the Spider Woman* that it planned to implement an Oscar campaign for the film [62].

The distributor made two vital changes to their distribution campaign. First, Island Alive was going to release the film in early fall. However, they opted to circulate the film in late summer before similar prestige films appeared in the marketplace [63]. Next, they originally intended to debut the film on the West Coast. But, Island Alive changed that initial strategy and premiered the film in New York to take advantage of favorable reviews and good word of mouth [63]. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* received excellent to good reviews from mainstream publications, newspapers, and trade publications like *Newsweek, Time, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Sun-Times,* and *Variety*. Although, *The New York Times* only gave the film a fair review, the newspaper did

interview Sonia Braga and printed another story on the production of the film. It was the first "hybrid" Latino film to be embraced by a wide variety of general market magazines and newspapers. Harry Clein explains how they took advantage of the press (personal communication, May 21, 2003).

> We got extraordinary reviews and we played those to the hilt. We used those reviews and magazine reviews. Even though this was not a big studio or a big budget movie, everybody was willing to run stories on it. Hector Babenco, Sonia [Braga], Will Hurt, and Raul Julia, and all the different aspects [of the film were discussed].

Afterwards, the distributor promoted the New York City debut by spending $15,000 for 14 or 15 television spots [63]. The spots were placed in fringe hours, in early mornings or late nights, to reduce costs. Brokaw contended these media buys would increase effectiveness of its spots [63]. In addition, it included a print campaign that was "black and white with an art deco face" [63].

Kiss of the Spider Woman initially targeted an intelligent moviegoing audience (H. Clein, personal communication, May, 21, 2003). To be more specific, Island Alive targeted "Yuppies" who were unhappy with films of this particular time (David Weisman, September 9, 2003). Consequently, although *Kiss of the Spider Woman* had a strong Latino element, the motion picture was sold as a specialized, big city film to art film audiences (Russell Schwartz, personal communication, July 22, 2003). Russell Schwartz, a marketing executive for Island Pictures, stated that independent films of this era were all circulated in a similar manner. In this particular case, Island Alive did not implement a unique strategy. It first secured a screen in an exclusive theater on the

Eastside of Manhattan and another one in Los Angeles prior to expanding to other art houses across the country.

The distributor originally only planned to release *The Kiss of the Spider Woman* in only eight to ten theaters [66]. Despite being released in the middle of the summer (in late July), which typically is not a strong window for lower budget films, this motion picture broke house records at New York's Cinema I by making $96,438 in its first 6 days [67]. After its premiere, Harry Clein stated that the film also benefited from various articles in the *Los Angeles Times* and *The New York Times* describing how the film was breaking office records (personal communication, May 21, 2003). After these stories, audiences suddenly became interested in going to watch this new, hot film, which was the goal of the campaign (personal communication, May 21, 2003). Taking advantage of the word of mouth and the free publicity from the newspapers, the distributor decided to expand the scope of its release to 30 theaters in the New York area and expand into Boston [66]. The film broke house records in New York City by grossing $252,109 in three weeks [62]. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* also broke house records in Boston's Nickelodeon and Harvard Square [63]. Island Alive extended the scope of the film's release to other East Coast and Midwest cities such as, Chicago and Washington D.C., before debuting in San Francisco and San Jose, and finally Los Angeles and Seattle, a few weeks later [63]. Russell Schwartz stated, "All the exhibition chains around the country saw how well it was doing and they wanted to book it."

According to *Art Murphy's Box Office Register*, the film had a tremendous run of 43 weeks. It slowly expanded the number of screens until it reached a high of 222

screens on its fifteenth week. However, its highest box office occurred on the ninth week when it generated a gross of over $1 million on 108 screens. It appears that Island Alive also utilized *The Kiss of the Spider Woman's* four Academy Award nominations to aggressively promote the film in February by expanding the number of screens from 50 to 160. After the Academy Awards, Island Alive utilized William Hurt's award winning performance to keep the film on approximately 150 screens [68]. The film had such an extensive theatrical run that it extended into its video release [68]. Carey Brokaw, the president and chief executive officer of Island Pictures, worked out a deal with Avco Embassy to postpone the video release until April [68]. The extended theatrical run of this motion picture became problematic for theater owners, who were fearful of the home video industry. As a result, theater owners adopted a new rule where they would not screen a film that was simultaneously out on video (D. Weiseman, September 9, 2003). Consequently, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was pulled from theaters and never was able to fully take advantage of the accolades it received at the Academy Awards. Nevertheless, this low-budget film eventually grossed over $17 million. In terms of a U.S. Latino box office success, it was by far the most successful hit of this particular era.

Island Alive did a tremendous job of promoting this particular film. It changed its traditional strategy of not utilizing television advertising and strategically placed ads on early or late fringe spots in order to reduce advertising costs [13, p. 244, 63]. The distributor also did not label this motion picture a Latino film. Despite the fact that *Kiss of The Spider Woman* takes place in South America and the majority of the cast and the director were Latino, the motion picture was marketed as a prestige film. According to

the distributor, the print campaign was designed to give the film a "distinguished profile." Perhaps, this is the reason why this motion picture crossed over to a mainstream audience, because the distributor did not pigeonhole *Kiss of the Spider Woman* as an ethnic film. For its savvy marketing efforts, Island Alive most likely earned an excellent profit as the motion picture only cost $1 million to produce and an additional $2 million to market [62].

In retrospect, Harry Clein states why he believes Island Alive was so successful at making *Kiss of the Spider Woman* a box office hit (personal communication, May 21, 2003).

> It became an event. It was a big event. Island treated it like a big movie. I think that was the difference. Everybody treated it like was a big movie, even though it was an independent film about two gay men in a prison in Latin America. We are going to deal with this as if it were a big movie. They made that decision and they never deviated from it. This was not a gay movie or this is a Latino movie, it is a big movie.

Russell Schwartz contends that *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was at the forefront of the American independent film movement. The distributor provided an early example of how far an independent film could be pushed into mainstream America. Schwartz believes that it was perhaps the first art film that really broke out into a commercial release (personal communication, July 22, 2003). In addition, both Schwartz and producer David Weiseman theorizes that the film may have also indirectly benefited from Rock Hudson's announcement that he had AIDS. Hudson made this announcement only about a month prior to the release of the film. Weiseman suggested that people found a connection between Rock Hudson and William Hurt's character, because they both were gay martyrs (personal communication, September 9, 2003). Perhaps, the film's subject

matter and this announcement made it politically correct to watch this movie (R. Schwartz, personal communication, July 22, 2003).

Summary of Key Events of the Early 1980s

The 1980 Census illustrated to studio marketers that the number of U.S. Latinos was growing quickly. In addition, a large number of Latinos lived in many of the most important U.S. urban centers like New York City and Los Angeles. Perhaps, more importantly, the U.S. movie industry rarely produced films that targeted this underserved and emergent niche audience. Another factor that encouraged Hollywood studios to target U.S. Latinos in the early 1980s was the growing number of acculturated Latinos, who preferred going to watch a Hollywood film over a Mexican film. They were accustomed to higher quality films rather than the low-budget films being produced by the Mexican film industry.

As Mexican film distribution lost some of its stranglehold on Spanish-speaking audiences in the U.S., various studio distributors began to circulate films that potentially appealed to this niche market. United Artists began to circulate Spanish-language films to art film and Spanish-speaking audiences with its specialty division United Artists Classics. Other Hollywood classics divisions or independent distributors in the early 1980s started to aggressively fill this void by acquiring Spanish-language foreign films and U.S. Latino films. However, Universal Pictures became the first studio that aggressively targeted Latinos with films like *Zoot Suit*. The studio also developed a department of special markets to better market its films to U.S. Latinos. This special markets division was successful in attracting more Latino audiences to its films.

Embassy Pictures also became an aggressive player in attempting to cultivate Latino audiences. This distributor promoted and circulated *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*. This distributor began to attempt to distribute Spanish-language prints simultaneously with English-language prints. The strategy was intended to take advantage of the "heat" produced by the mainstream promotional campaign. These efforts by various independent distributors illustrated the increasing importance of the U.S. Latino market.

Independent Latino film projects that debuted in the early 1980s benefited from strong advocates like Robert Redford and Lindsay Law. Redford's Sundance Film Institute was vital for early films like *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* and *El Norte* in developing film ideas and educating filmmakers in the business portion of the motion picture industry. Lindsay Law provided critical financial support for *El Norte* and *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*. Without his assistance, these two important films may not have been completed. Perhaps, just as importantly, Law allowed *El Norte* to first be theatrically released prior to being televised by PBS.

The Reagan tax laws of the early 1980s made it less risky to finance a U.S. Latino film. An independent film investor could place his money in a tax shelter in the early portions of a film's development. Investors were also attracted to the lucrative marketplace for filmmakers of the era. The rapid expansion of theater building had created a sellers market. Exhibitors needed to find alternative film product for their screens. Furthermore, ancillary markets like pay TV and home video stores aggressively looked for feature films. For example, HBO spent millions of dollars to license films from Hollywood studios. New video stores searched for product to fill their empty

shelves. The marketplace had created an environment where an independent film investor would almost certainly make a profit on his investment.

The dismal condition of Mexican film production may have been another factor that encouraged Hollywood studios to target U.S. Latinos in the early 1980s. Mexico was no longer producing high-quality films that could potentially attract Spanish-speaking Latinos and bilingual Latinos audiences. The primary problem with the Mexican film industry was its reliance on the state for production funds. The terrible condition of the economy did not allow the state to give the film industry enough funds to produce quality films or maintain its facilities. The economy hindered Televisa's ability to circulate Spanish-language prints in its newly acquired theater chain. The poor state of the peso led to problems between Azteca Films and Mexican producers. These producers no longer wanted to be paid in pesos when their films were being circulated in the United States. In addition, they were unhappy that Azteca continually distributed films in the U.S. without notifying them. These disagreements led to the emergence of private Mexican distributors like American General Film Distribution and Mexcinema.

The Mexican film industry's fiscal problems also affected Spanish-language theaters in the U.S. The lack of product being produced forced these exhibitors to begin filling their screens with Hollywood films that were dubbed into Spanish. These theaters could also not compete with the newer multiplexes being built. The Mexican film industry did not invest or encourage theaters to maintain the conditions of their facilities. Spanish-speaking theaters also had direct competition from a cable channel Galavision. This channel acquired film products to televise and gave Spanish-speaking audiences an

alternative to going to the theater. More importantly, outside of California, the demographics of Latinos were changing. Many Latino families were earning more money and beginning to leave downtown areas in Houston and Chicago for the middle-class suburbs. These Latinos were moving away from Spanish-language theaters and closer to multiplexes.

Several Latino independent films that were circulated in the early 1980s had disappointing box-office results. No Hollywood distributor could be convinced to acquire *Heartbreaker*. The film lacked a marketable Hollywood star and probably would have been better served to be four-walled in either Spanish-language theaters or theaters near Latino neighborhoods. Similar to *Heartbreaker*, *Latino* did not have any marketable stars. Though an art film distributor acquired the film, its subject matter made it difficult to promote to mainstream or art house audiences. Furthermore, the film would most likely not resonate with U.S. Latinos, who have a long tradition of military heroism. They would most likely not be attracted to a film where a Latino soldier suddenly develops a conscience in the heat of battle. *Crossover Dreams* relied on the old stereotype of the musical Latino. Though the film starred Ruben Blades, his audience tends to be located on the East Coast. The film apparently did not attract the interest of other large Latino groups like Mexican-Americans and only had a short run.

Zoot Suit illustrated a challenge for Hollywood marketers who intended to target the U.S. Latino audience. Studios that wanted to successfully cultivate this ethnic group had to find universal Latino themes in order to attract this group, beyond specific Mexican-American themes. In this particular case, Universal developed a specific

historical theme that only appealed to a specific group of Mexican-Americans. Consequently, the distributor was unable to develop anticipation among Latinos, outside of Los Angeles, whom had a negative perception of the Pachuco. Lastly, *Zoot Suit* was not able to overcome a negative review from *New York Times*. A positive review from this influential newspaper may have attracted art film moviegoers from the East Coast.

While Universal should be commended for releasing a Mexican-American story, the studio did a poor job of marketing the film. The studio apparently did not make much of an effort to promote this film to mainstream audiences, when it became apparent that the story would not resonate well with U.S. Latinos who lived outside of Los Angeles. After several focus groups that were conducted throughout the country, Universal was aware that U.S. Latinos were not going to respond to this film, because they had a negative image of the Pachuco. They also knew that U.S. Latinos did not want to relive ugly incidents like the Zoot Suit Riots in motion pictures. Nevertheless, the studio never aggressively attempted to promote the film to mainstream or art film audiences outside of Mexican-American cities.

The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez was another Mexican-American story. This particular case highlighted the dangers of being acquired by a larger distributor that lacked the patience to slowly expand the audience of the films. The distributor's decision to quickly disperse prints overextended The Cortez Group's grassroots marketing efforts, which led to low box-office figures in New York City and Boston. In addition, the distributor's inability to get the film into Los Angeles' Spanish-language theaters certainly hurt the film's box office figures. Simultaneously, The Cortez Group

highlighted the potential effectiveness of a grassroots market campaign by slowing building an audience in San Francisco and El Paso. After reacquiring the film from Embassy Pictures, the group repeated its initial campaign and had a successful theatrical run in Denver.

Island Alive was the distributor most responsible for illustrating the potential of U.S. Latino films by effectively marketing *El Norte* and *Kiss of The Spider Woman*. Its first film, *El Norte* was a joint venture with Cinecom. They relied on mainstream press reviews in a few key cities to attract an art film audience. The "buzz" from the English-language press spilled over to the Spanish-language press. By the time the film was circulated on the West Coast, it had developed a tremendous word-of-mouth throughout the Midwest and the East Coast. Furthermore, Cinecom/Island Alive implemented some grassroots marketing by screening the film to Central Americans, who had first hand experience with the atrocities in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador. Lastly, they worked closely with Spanish-language theaters in Southern California in order to tailor their promotions to a Spanish-speaking Latino audience. They presented an early effective marketing model for attracting this ethnic group.

Island Alive's second U.S. Latino film *Kiss of The Spider Woman* was a more aggressive venture. The distributor took advantage of an unprecedented amount of free publicity from the mainstream media, which really embraced the film. The marketers utilized these excellent reviews from various movie critics to launch its film slowly. Island Alive expanded the scope of its release as the word of mouth grew among art film audiences until it reached mainstream cinemas. Furthermore, the marketing executives

made some savvy decisions that included moving up the release date of the film to avoid a cluttered marketplace with similar films that could potentially compete for the same audience. Though the film was about Latinos, the distributor avoided placing a Latino label on the film. The lack of an ethnic label enabled the film marketers to promote *Kiss of The Spider Woman*, as simply a high quality, art film that takes place in Latin America. Lastly, the motion picture also most likely benefited from casting William Hurt. Many moviegoers were already familiar with his previous roles in *Body Heat* (1981) and *The Big Chill* (1983). The film ultimately had a long and successful theatrical run. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* received four Academy Award nominations, which made it one of most acclaimed independent films of the early 1980s.

A film critic's approval and free publicity generated by magazines and newspapers were also important to the success of the early U.S. Latino films. Film critics like Janet Maslin of *The New York Times* and Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun Times* were important figures in the successful launching *El Norte* in Chicago and New York City. These film critics gave *El Norte* instant credibility. As a result, the film slowly picked up momentum and the distributor was able to expand the scope of the release throughout most of the country. Ebert also gave *Kiss of The Spider Woman* a very good review. However, this film also received favorable reviews from mainstream magazines film critics like David Ansen of *Newsweek* and Richard Schnickel of *Time*. *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was the only U.S. Latino independent film of this period to receive this type of publicity from these magazines. During the early 1980s, the critic played a significant role in introducing audiences to these independent films.

The other distributors of U.S. Latino films did not match the success of Island Alive or generate as much free publicity. These various marketers attempted to develop and cultivate a growing number of assimilated and acculturated Latinos by initially circulating low-budget films. The first seven U.S. Latino films of the early 1980s – *Zoot Suit, The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez, Heartbreakers, El Norte, Crossover Dreams, Kiss of the Spider Woman,* and *Latino* – were developed as low-budget films in order to reduce risk for both the investors and the distributors, because these films were targeting an underserved and under researched market with no successful track record. The low-budget nature of these films also indicated how much money these distributors had to invest in promotions, since distributors of this era rarely spent more money on marketing than on production costs. As a result, the majority of these distributors did not have the marketing budgets to invest in buying expensive television advertising in order to aggressively promote their films. These distributors had to rely on effective word-of-mouth campaigns and free publicity like positive reviews from movie critics and talent being interviewed by the press. Furthermore, these distributors did not have the capital to produce a large number of prints. Therefore, most of these motion pictures were only distributed regionally or received limited distribution in large urban centers.

The limited marketing budgets and the limited number of prints circulated for this genre of films in the early 1980s resulted in a mixed bag for distributors of U.S. Latino films. *Zoot Suit* was not a highly successful venture for Universal Pictures. Nevertheless, Universal Studios deserves to be applauded for its initial effort trying to cultivate the Latino audience. Unlike other Hollywood studios that tend to attract

Spanish-speaking Latinos by subtitling or printing a Spanish-language print, it attempted to produce a film about Latinos, specifically English-speaking Latinos. However, Universal's initial efforts highlighted a problem that Hollywood studios will continue to confront when producing U.S. Latino films. Unlike the Black population, Latinos are not as easily drawn to these motion pictures or as simply categorized. This ethnic group has a great deal of diversity with some conflict among its larger groups, specifically among Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, and Puerto Ricans. This diversity among Latinos helps explain why *Zoot Suit* performed so poorly on the East Coast. While the incident in Sleepy Lagoon is significant to the Mexican American community in Los Angeles, the film did not resonate with Puerto Rican audiences in New York City or the Cuban Americans in Miami. For example, Latinos on the West Coast typically perceived El Pachuco to be a strong and positive representation of the Latino community [69]. On the other hand, East Coast Latinos felt the identical character was a negative representation of the community [69]. This highlighted the fact that the Mexican-American movie-going community was not strong enough to produce significant box-office grosses nor could they sustain a film in theaters for a long period of time

Another huge problem that marketers of U.S. Latino films had was the lack of commercial Latino movie stars, who had the ability to cross over to multiple Latino audiences or mainstream audiences. Edward James Olmos who starred in both *Zoot Suit* and *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* was perhaps the most well known Latino star of this period. However, he was not a commercial star outside of the Latino community. Sonia Braga and Raul Julia were still relatively unknown actors to most mainstream

moviegoers. As a result, distributors of U.S. Latino films had to rely on either promoting the writer, the director, or hiring a cross over star, because these Latino actors did not have name recognition.

Some distributors that avoided the Latino label had some successful results by promoting their motion pictures as art films. For instance, *Kiss of the Spider Woman* was by far the most successful U.S. Latino film that was not marketed as a Latino film. Much of the film's audience was art film audiences. *El Norte* also built its audience by targeting art film audiences on the East Coast. On the other hand, *Latino* and *Heartbreakers* were other films that avoided the Latino label, but did not produce significant box office grosses. Despite the mixed box office results from these films that avoided the Latino label, these motion pictures like *El Norte* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman* generated higher box office figures than films like *Zoot Suit* and *Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* that primarily targeted Mexican American audiences or *Crossover Dreams* that focused on East Coast Latinos. These film marketers targeted these moviegoers by highlighting the importance of these historical incidents and the lack of films that targeted this ethnic group.

The success of *El Norte* demonstrated to Hollywood distributors that a U.S. Latino film could be a box office hit. *El Norte* represented an early example of how to effectively market a foreign-language film about a controversial topic to art film audiences. Concurrently, Island Pictures and Cinecom provided an excellent template on how to target and attract Latino moviegoers with an effective Spanish-language campaign. Almost identical to *El Norte, Kiss of the Spider Woman* highlighted the

significance of avoiding an ethnic label. In addition, the distributor illustrated the importance of hiring a marketable actor who has crossover potential with general audiences. More importantly, the profitable returns of these two films and a growing population provided Hollywood studios with the impetus to begin acquiring, and distributing U.S. Latino films later in the decade.

The emergence of non-studio affiliated U.S. Latino films of the early 1980s mirrored what was occurring in the larger American independent film movement. Many of these U.S. Latino films were low-budget motion pictures that were able to accumulate production funds through a variety of sources like foundations. The low-budget nature of these films made them low risk ventures for independent distributors that did not have high marketing budgets. Simultaneously, independent distributors were able to capitalize on a populace that was increasingly looking for an alternative type of film outside Hollywood motion pictures. Independent distributors also took advantage of the growth of screens that left exhibitors without sufficient product. Lastly, the decline of the Mexican film industry benefited U.S. Latino distributors, as they no longer had direct competition for a similar audience. These elements blended in the early 1980s and provided a marketplace that would enable distributors to successfully distribute U.S. Latino films like *El Norte* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*.

Key Marketing Strategies (1980-1985)

Film Title	Date of Release	Distributor	Grassroots Marketing	Critics	Interviews	Media	Spanish Ad. Campaign	Spanish/ Subtitled	Avoid Latino Label	Soundtrack/ Song	Box office gross	# of screens (premiere)/ (broadest)	Theatrical Run
Zoot Suit	Oct-81	Universal Pictures	X			X	X				$3.2m	1 screen/ 30 screens	17 weeks
Heartbreaker	May-83	Monarex							X		$100,000	9 screens/ 9 screens	2 weeks
The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez	Aug-83	Embassy	X	X		X					$909,000	1 screen/ 6 screens	12 weeks*
El Norte	Dec-83	Island Alive/ Cinecom	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		$5.5m	1 screen/ 14 screens	32 weeks
Kiss of the Spider Woman	Jul-85	Island Alive		X	X	X			X		$17.5m	1 screen/ 222 screens	43 weeks
Crossover Blues	Aug-85	Miramax						X			$240,311	1 screen/ 8 screens	7 weeks
Latino	Nov-85	Cinecom International						X*	X		$50,000	1 screen/ 3 screens*	3 weeks*

Grassroots marketing -- free screenings, distribute postcards, key chains, t-shirts to local community organizations like churches, youth groups, etc.

Critics -- relied on important critics approval.

Interviews -- the talent conducted interviews with the press in order to generate publicity.

Media -- media advertising on television, radio, print, or billboards.

Spanish-language advertising campaign -- ran media advertising in Spanish.

Spanish/Subtitled prints -- produced Spanish or Subtitled prints in addition to English-language prints.

Avoid Latino Label -- attempted to attract a broader audience by avoiding the Mexican or Latino label.

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CHAPTER 4: FROM MARGINS TO THE MAINSTREAM: 1986-1989

The success of independent films distributors in the early 1980s did not last long. By the late 1980s, many small motion picture distributors failed. These independent distributors over extended themselves financially by also attempting to produce feature films. Many of these companies like Island Alive were not be able to recover from this decision. Independent films also apparently lost their novelty within a marketplace that no longer appeared to be demanding as many of these motion pictures. For instance, the once lucrative ancillary markets like home video began to gravitate towards Hollywood studio films instead of independent films. As a result, more independent films began to seek a Hollywood distributor in order to gain access to screens and ensure financial success. Within this volatile marketplace for independent motion pictures, U.S. Latino films like *La Bamba* (1987) secured a studio distributor and experienced an unprecedented amount of success. On the other hand, independent U.S. Latino films that did not obtain a Hollywood distributor like *Break of Dawn* (1988) encountered an extremely difficult marketplace.

By the late 1980s, a number of structural changes occurred within the motion picture industry that affected independent distributors of U.S. Latino films and how these feature films were released. These changes signaled the end of the widespread distribution of Spanish-language films. Furthermore, this evolving marketplace made it imperative for the eight U.S. Latino film projects of this period to find a Hollywood distributor for the motion picture, if these pictures wanted to achieve box-office success. Simultaneously, the Latino market became more important as Hollywood studios began

to hire Spanish-language marketing experts. After providing a brief survey of the marketplace, I will give a brief analysis of how U.S. Latino films like *The Milagro Beanfield War* (1988) and hybrid U.S. Latino films such as *The Pentient* (1988) were promoted and distributed. Lastly, through a case study approach, I will examine how two U.S. Latino films, *La Bamba* and *Stand and Deliver* (1988), were promoted and distributed by Hollywood distributors.

Late 1980s Marketplace

After independent distributors successfully circulated *El Norte* (1983) and *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985), Hollywood studios in the late 1980s began to target more Latino moviegoers aggressively. Two primary factors escalated Hollywood's interest in the U.S. Latino market. First, Hollywood marketers became aware that Latino consumers spent 30% more than the average North American on entertainment, which provided the impetus to test this potentially lucrative niche market [1]. Next, the studio pursuit of U.S. Latino audiences intensified after they discovered that this ethnic group went to the movies as often as other important niche markets like teenagers and Blacks [1]. At same time, mainstream marketers aggressively pursued Spanish-speaking Latinos as advertiser spending swelled to over $580 million [2].

Film marketers of U.S. Latino films could also take advantage of Spanish-speaking Latinos' attraction to Hollywood films by receiving "free publicity" on the popular Univision television program *Hablemos de Cine* (Let's Talk Movies). This well-liked program featured Argentina's Jorge Elias and Mexico's Humberto Luna, which was aired on over 500 affiliates and seen by over 1.5 million Spanish-speaking and bilingual

Latinos [3]. The program had the same basic premise as USA's Siskel and Ebert. The show included a great deal of bantering as Elias, the professional critic, and Luna, the comic, discussed a film's qualities [3]. Elias and Luna would review two or three American films during each episode, since few Mexican films were circulated on a nationwide basis [3]. More importantly, the television show provided Hollywood films with free publicity to over a million viewers. The popularity of the program also revealed to Hollywood distributors that Spanish-speaking Latinos were indeed interested in their films despite the fact they were in English.

The importance of the U.S. Latino market was becoming apparent as Hollywood industry trade publications, especially *Variety*, began tracking the growth of this ethnic group by developing a list of the Top 20 Hispanic Markets. This list illustrated the increasing size of this niche market after the 1980 Census and the projected growth of this ethnic group. *Variety's* figures demonstrated that Latinos tended to reside in large urban centers. For example, according to *Variety*, by 1985, over 16 million Latinos resided in the top 20 Latino markets, which represented a growth of nearly five million people or roughly 30% from its 1980 calculations. *Variety's* figures, based on the 1980 census, also indicated the high concentration of U.S. Latinos in important markets like Los Angeles (27.5%), New York (19.9%), Houston (17.6%), and Chicago (14%). More importantly, this list indicated that the percentage of Latinos in these large markets was increasing. Beyond pointing out key Latino markets, the listing indicated that Latinos could be efficiently reached with a regional marketing campaign that focused on the Southwest and a few vital cities like New York, Chicago, and Miami.

As the Latino population grew, mainstream advertisers like film marketers began to spend more money on Spanish-language print advertising. General market spending reached over $57 million on this medium [2]. However, Spanish-language print advertising for larger corporate marketers was still limited in nature, because these dailies were only regional or local newspapers. Spanish-speaking Latinos in the U.S. did not have a national Spanish-language newspaper comparable to *The New York Times* or *USA Today* that had subscribers throughout the country. *Noticias del Mundo* attempted to change the local or regional nature of these Spanish-language dailies by becoming the first national Spanish-language daily in the mid-1980s. *Noticias del Mundo*'s strategy for attracting various Latino ethnic groups was to print two types of stories [4]. First, the daily provided relevant national stories that affected the entire Latino community [4]. Next, the newspaper understood the diverse nature of Latinos living in different parts of the country, so it printed local stories that concerned the Latinos in each particular region [4]. The successful launching of this national daily provided a great deal of promise for film marketers who attempted to target this diverse Spanish-speaking audience, because a single advertisement now had the potential to reach Latinos in every part of the country.

On the other hand, English-speaking Latinos continued to be overlooked by Spanish-language print, radio, and television advertising campaigns. The emergence of two Latino-oriented magazines, *Hispanic Business* and *Hispanic*, provided evidence that there were also a growing number of acculturated or assimilated Latinos. These Latino-oriented magazines provided Hollywood marketers with a direct vehicle to English-speaking Latinos. *Hispanic Business* was founded in 1979 and signified the growing

economic importance of this niche market. Initially, the magazine only attracted a limited number of major advertisers such as food and beverage companies [5]. However, by late 1980s a broader range of mainstream companies finally began to advertise their products in this magazine [5]. In 1988, *Hispanic* magazine was launched. This publication celebrated the accomplishments of U.S. Latinos in business, politics, and culture. *Hispanic* had a broader appeal and typically attracted a younger reader than *Hispanic Business*. Furthermore, the magazine provided a potentially cost effective advertising tool for U.S. Latino films in order to reach one of its target markets -- English-speaking Latinos.

With a growing number of English and Spanish-speaking Latino moviegoers, the escalating number of Latino-oriented advertising vehicles, and the box-office success of films like *Kiss of the Spider Woman, El Norte,* and Argentina's *Official Story*, the future of independent U.S. Latino films appeared to be extremely bright. Each of these films was a critical success and nominated for at lease one Academy Award. These films illustrated that a Spanish-language film or U.S. Latino film could cross over to an art film audience and in some cases to a mainstream audience. Another optimistic sign for the future of U.S. Latino independent films was that Island Alive had successfully attracted both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking Latinos by circulating Spanish and English versions of *El Norte*. The successful cultivation of these two types of Latino audiences increased the box office potential of this niche market and provided a template of how to successfully sell a film to Latinos. The future appeared bright for distributors of U.S. Latino independent films.

Shortly after the success of independent U.S. Latino films like *El Norte* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, the studios successfully marketed and promoted and *La Bamba* and *Stand and Deliver*. Prior to Edward James Olmos being nominated for an Oscar for his performance in *Stand and Deliver, Time* magazine featured him on the cover for its July 11,1988 edition [6]. The depiction of Olmos on the cover of this prominent mainstream magazine symbolized the possible acceptance of U.S. Latino talent by general audiences. Many mainstream publications like *Newsweek* began to refer to this short-term success of U.S. Latinos as the "Hispanic Hollywood". These magazines predicted that Latinos were going to become a new and powerful force within the motion picture industry as they emerged from grassroots production companies and began to enter the mainstream [7].

In spite of these gains, however, several industrial factors affecting independent film distributors would short-circuit the strides made by these motion pictures in the early 1980s, in particular U.S. Latino films and foreign films. For instance, a couple of independent U.S. Latino films like *The Pentient* and *Break of Dawn* did not secure more than ten screens. Part of the problem for these smaller distributors was that the U.S. exhibition industry increasingly came under the control of the major studio distributors. The studios move into theater acquisitions began in September 1985 when Columbia Pictures bought 12 screens in the New York area [8, 9]. The landscape of the exhibition industry officially changed in July 1986, as the Justice Department formally announced that it would not oppose the studio acquisitions of theater chains [9]. The Justice Department essentially turned back the clock forty years and allowed the studios to vertically integrate once again. This decision triggered a buying frenzy of theaters.

Paramount, Warners Bros., MCA/Universal, and TriStar/Columbia Pictures spent more than a billion dollars in acquiring about 20% of North American movie theaters [9, 10]. *Variety* cited that many industry analysts, who predicted that this vertical integration gave the major studios more control of their production, distribution, and exhibition of their films, since a major studio could give their product easy access to viewers and deny entry to small, independent distributors that did not own theaters [9].

Independent distributors were also hurt by the lack of theater growth in the latter half of the 1980s. According to the *Encyclopedia of Exhibition,* the number of screens nationwide increased by only 600. The leveling off in number of theaters screens in the late 1980s resulted in an environment where the major studios could more easily meet the demands of theatrical exhibitors. Consequently, mainstream theater chains no longer had to rely on independent film distributors for product. The lack of demand for film product affected independent distributors like Platform Releasing that attempted to circulate and promote a U.S. Latino films, such as *Break of Dawn*, in a critical way. These small film distributors often relied heavily on exhibitors' inability to fill its screens with product in order to secure a few screens, so their film could build a word of mouth as opposed to the studio distributor that created awareness through television and media advertising. Thus, film distributors with edgy or niche-targeted subject matter had to hope that mainstream exhibitors would take chances on their film's ability to attract moviegoers, because exhibitors did not have other viable options.

Within this particular economic environment, exhibitors were more likely to cater to studio films at the expense of independent films. For example, instead of leaving one

or two screens available for art films, multiplex exhibitors began to move blockbusters with huge advertising budgets onto these screens [11]. As a result, independent film distributors had an extremely difficult time securing screens for their films, which reduced the possibility of another independent U.S. Latino film like *Kiss of the Spider Woman* from crossing over from a limited art house circuit to mainstream theaters [11, p.269]. The trend of independent films not being able to secure screens actually began in 1984, although the problem became more widespread by a glut of independent film product in 1986 [12]. Independent motion picture production skyrocketed from 284 films in 1985 to 468 in 1986, as many investors were still encouraged by the success of the independent films in the early 1980s [13, p.44]. But, exhibitors simply could not accommodate the huge increase in independent film product. As a result, only 248 films -- or 53% of independent films were theatrically released in 1986 [14].

In contrast, virtually every Hollywood studio film was distributed theatrically [14]. The soaring production and marketing costs, which rose over 250% during the 1980s, forced studios to attempt to secure more screens and extend their films' theatrical runs. These increased costs required studios to extend theater runs in order to squeeze out box office receipts to make their films more attractive to secondary markets [15]. For that reason, large independent distribution and production companies, such as Orion, began seeking studio distributors in order to gain access to the nations' screens [16]. The crowded marketplace and increasing cost of national advertising budgets, estimated at $3 million, made film distribution a risky business venture for independents [12, 15]. Simultaneously, studios found acquiring independent films and distributing them through

their pipeline to be very lucrative, since these distributors' overhead costs were fixed [17].

The studio dominance extended into the video rental market as independent video distributors of U.S. Latino films were influenced negatively by a decline in the importance of their product [18]. The reasons for this wane in the demand for independent film were the following: First, the growth of new video stores outlets slowed down considerably [18]. As these stores became established, they began to demand more current studio titles, because, as these stores became established, their need for alternative film videos like *Break of Dawn* diminished as their shelves were already stocked with specialty films [18]. In addition, home video consumers were less inclined to rent a cutting edge or trendy film. These video renters were seeking films that they had heard of, but simply had not seen in the theaters. Paul Culberg, president of New World Video, stated: "the days of releasing your film in three to five markets and trying to create the impression you have a current theatrical hit and then capitalizing in video, are long gone. The retailer and consumer are much more savvy than they were in past" [18].

Next and more problematic for independent distributors was that the studios aggressively promoted their blockbuster films throughout their respective ancillary runs. This trend of heavily promoting video releases became extremely important marketing ventures for the studios as video sales and rentals doubled theatrical box office figures [19]. More specifically, a large percentage of this revenue appeared to be coming directly from home video rentals instead of video sales, as the ratio of home video rentals

to sales climbed to about nine-to-one by the mid-1980s [20, p. 334]. As a result of aggressively promoting their video titles, studios needed more shelf space within video stores as it became clear that their "A" films or blockbusters would become the most popular rentals for consumers. This lack of shelf space hurt small distributors of “B” films or independent films. For instances, a Vidmark Communications study revealed a 23% drop in “B” title retail orders by 1988 [21].

Independent film distributors of U.S. Latino films were further handicapped by their inability to take advantage of the lucrative sell-through video market to increase their films’ ancillary revenues. A sell-through video is a film purchased by the consumer to become a part of a household's personal library. By the late 1980s, blockbusters and animated films were producing huge sell-through video figures for their studios. Studios with animated feature films like Disney especially benefited from children’s ability to be able watch an animated film repeatedly [20, p. 333]. Conversely, many art films did not receive the necessary amount of publicity or secure a sufficient number of screens to produce a successful sell-through home video. Essentially, the same market structure that existed in the motion picture industry was also apparent in the home video industry [20, p. 338]. Consequently, despite the fact that revenue from the home video sell-through market increased seven-fold from 1985 to the early 1990s, it did not benefit many independent film distributors [22]. The tightening theatrical and home video market made it more difficult to find investors for independent films [11, p.270].

The factors above eliminated many viable independent distributors of U.S. Latino films. Independent distributors were crippled by the encroachment of the studios with

deep pockets that looked to acquire independently produced films [23, p.50]. The studios persistently searched for these potential hidden gems, which made it difficult for even the largest independent distributors to survive. The majors developed a seller's market by driving prices through the roof for independent film acquisitions. This highly competitive marketplace became a graveyard for independent film distributors between 1986 and 1989, as more companies could no longer profitably circulate independent films [22]. For example, Island Pictures, which successfully promoted and circulated *El Norte* (co-distributed with Alive Films and Cinecom) and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, were driven out of the independent film market by 1990 [24]. This prestigious independent film company, similar to other up-and-coming film distributors, overextended the company's resources by developing an in-house production department [25]. Island Pictures did not have the necessary assets to overcome a few box-office disappointments, such as *Nobody's Fool* (1986), or a couple of projects gone awry, because it had to absorb both production and marketing costs [26].

Independent filmmakers also had an increasingly difficult time locating film production funds outside the Hollywood studio system. Potential independent investors were no longer encouraged to invest in independent films, because many of the tax breaks in the early 1980s were no longer applicable by 1987. Reagan's Tax Reform Acts of 1986 and 1987 took away several of these investing privileges [27]. For instance, investors could no longer write off money used to buy limited partnerships in film production companies [27]. These film production investments acted as tax shelters for investors who could invest in volatile independent films, because they could always write

off these investments on their income taxes [28]. Tax write- offs were almost completely eliminated, since they were considered passive activities by the reform acts [29]. Passive activities were considered actions that you did not participate in directly [29]. These acts required that investors could only write off these losses, if they actually made a profit on future passive activities [29]. These reforms also increased capital gains taxes from 20% to 28% [27]. Lastly, independent filmmakers could no longer write off all the expenses of a production, because costs had to be amortized over a three-year period [30].

In addition, the Reagan administration cut public funding for the arts, which were designed to assist minority artists like U.S. Latino filmmakers [23, p.506]. For example, independent film producers could no longer rely on federal funding from agencies such as the National Endowment of the Humanities (NEH) or American Playhouse. These organizations provided critical monetary support to *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* and *El Norte*. *Stand and Deliver* was the only U.S. Latino film, within this five-year window, to receive financial support from American Playhouse. Without federal funding, raising money for independent films became an extremely difficult venture for any filmmaker who wanted to produce motion pictures outside the studio system [11, p.270-271].

While the changing marketplace made it increasingly difficult place for independent film distributors to survive, the number of foreign-language films being circulated in the United States dropped drastically in 1986 [15]. These films faced escalating competition for screens from American independent films as well as British films [15]. Often times, distributors of foreign-language films did not have the marketing budgets or the political clout to push English-language films off their screens. This

dilemma became exacerbated if a competing film developed legs. If this occurred, the premiere of the foreign-language film would be delayed indefinitely. Furthermore, these motion pictures encountered a marketplace where single-screen cinemas that once catered to their films were being driven out of business by multi-screen theaters [31, p.32]. It was no longer economically viable to have a single screen when an exhibitor could run several films simultaneously for approximately the same overhead [32]. Multiplexes also increased the possibility that an exhibitor would book a box office hit as well as increase the number of patrons that purchased snacks at the concession stand [32].

As many of the single-screen theaters began to make way for multiplexes, the importance of Spanish-language marketers for Hollywood films became more critical as the Mexican film industry produced fewer films for Spanish-language exhibitors in the U.S. The lack of Mexican films resulted in a greater reliance on Hollywood films being dubbed into Spanish by Spanish-language theaters [33]. This strategy represented a last ditch effort by many Spanish-language theater owners to remain in business. Universal Pictures took advantage of the lack of film product coming from Mexico to successfully released *An American Tail* (1987) in two languages. It was the first Hollywood film to be simultaneously circulated in both English and Spanish prints [34]. The Spanish-language prints were a huge success with Spanish-speaking Latinos in Los Angeles [34]. Originally, the Spanish version of *An American Tail* was released in the smaller Rialto Theater, but this print generated so much business that it was moved to the larger Orpheum Theater [33]. This Spanish version generated the second-highest box office among all theaters that ran the film in the country [33]. Metropolitan Theaters in Los

Angeles, which owned these theaters, ran an advertisement in trade publications to encourage other studios to simultaneously release its prints in English and Spanish [35]. The exhibitor argued that the success of the Spanish-language print was directly related to the fact that it was distributed during the apex of Universal's marketing campaign [35].

Other studios began to take advantage of the Latino market by releasing subtitled prints. For instance, MGM's *Running Scared* (1986) flopped with mainstream audience, grossing only $500,000 nationally, but this film did surprisingly good business with Spanish-speaking Latino audiences [36]. Warner Bros. attempted to emulate the success of both *An American Tail* and *Running Scared* by circulating subtitling Spanish prints of *Over the Top* (1987) and *Lethal Weapon* (1987). This endeavor had mixed results for Warners. For example, despite the fact that this film failed in all the other markets, *Over the Top* earned $70,000 in two Los Angeles' Spanish-language theaters [37]. The box office figure generated by these two theaters represented 17% of the total box office for the entire Southern California region [38]. On the contrary, *Lethal Weapon's* subtitled printed was not a hit in Spanish-language theaters, but the film was a success in most general markets [2].

The most successful Spanish-language distributor of this period was Buenavista Distributors, a division of Walt Disney Company, which circulated Spanish-language prints of Disney films to Spanish-language theaters. Fernando Munoz, who headed this particular company, stated that older Disney classics remained very popular with Latinos [35]. However, he contended that Spanish-language theater owners that target young males, who have only been in this country for a few years, was too narrow of an audience

to remain viable [35]. Munoz estimated that this portion of the population only encompassed about 14% of the Latino market [35]. He suggested that if Spanish-language theaters began to gravitate towards Spanish-language dubbed films instead of low-budget Mexican films that these theaters would increase their potential audience and improve their economic future [35].

For a brief period of time in the mid-1980s, low-budget Mexican films and dubbed prints from Buenavista Distributors were able to take advantage of a network of 250 Spanish-language theaters throughout the United States [39, p. 214]. A number of these theaters were in Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, and Denver. For Mexican producers, this network of Spanish-language theaters in the United States were extremely important, because they could not recoup their expenses if they had to solely rely on theatrical receipts that were generated in Mexico. The Mexican peso was constantly being devalued. The United States provided about half of this film industry's gross revenue. According to producer Rogelio Agrasanchez, Sr., who made a number of low-budget Mexican films, contended that the "Mexican cinema would disappear" without the important Southwestern markets of the United States [39, p. 214].

Despite the success of low-budget Mexican films and dubbed prints from various U.S. distributors, numerous Spanish-language theaters went out of business by the late 1980s. The large Spanish-language circuit that circulated primarily Mexican films throughout the country, once numbered over six hundred theaters dropped to about forty theaters [40]. The long tradition of Mexican independent producers not utilizing their sizeable profits from their low budget films for improving production facilities or

attempting to elevate the quality of their films finally caught up with the financially strapped film industry [41]. The trend of producing cheap films was no longer effective in attracting U.S. Latino moviegoers by the late 1980s [42, p.109]. Only the most successful Mexican films earned box office figures of more $150,000 in U.S. Spanish-language theaters [43]. Even in the lucrative Los Angeles market, the average box office totals of low-budget Mexican films were declining [43]. The U.S. box office, which represented an invaluable territory, for Mexican films fell by 80 or 90%, as these films lacked interesting subject matter that would attract Spanish-speaking Latino audiences [42, p.112].

Another factor that affected Spanish-language movie going in California was the crackdown on illegal immigration by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)[44]. The INS changed its deportation policy. It began to transport Latin Americans, who did not prepared their documents to remain in the country legally, out of the United States [33]. As a result, many potential moviegoers became reluctant about attending theaters that could be raided by the INS. This had a huge toll on Spanish-language exhibitors, since a large portion of its audience were illegal immigrants, who were seeking to be entertained in their native language.

The emerging Spanish-language home video industry also lessened the need to attend Spanish-language theaters, as Latino audiences found renting a video in the comfort of their home or apartment more convenient than attending a Mexican film in a rundown venue [33]. The Spanish-language home video industry took a huge toll on the Spanish-language exhibitors, as it became the first revenue source for Mexican films in

the U.S., instead of a theatrical release. By the late 1980s, home video sales of Mexican films often quadrupled theatrical box office [45]. This led Spanish-language theater owner Metropolitan to develop Million Dollar Video Corp., which sold numerous Spanish-language videos [44]. In addition, Mexican film distributors like Mexicinema and Azteca setup home video operations in the United States [45, 46]. Rafael Rivera of Condor Video estimated that a top Mexican film could generate as much as $65,000 in home video sales with a well-known star [47]. The development of the home video industry not only became a potentially lucrative market for independent Mexican producers, as the VCR penetration rate reached over 60% in Latino households, it also reduced the expense of developing prints for the financially strapped film industry [47]. One last important benefit for independent producers was that they were able to more easily able to collect revenue from their investments through video rather than dealing with a Mexican film distributor [33].

Unfortunately, many Mexican filmmakers did not profit from the growing video market [48, p. 212-213]. Enrique Soto Izquierdo, the director of Instituto Mexicano de Cinematografia (IMCINE), and his associates sold videos to U.S. Spanish-language stores without the authorization of filmmakers [48, p.213]. These videos were also not sold in Mexico in an effort to avoid easily being detected as well as having to pay the original filmmakers royalties. The filmmakers notified Mexican authorities on these illegal transactions. Despite the fact that filmmakers compiled substantial amount of evidence against IMCINE, Mexican authorities opted not to punish Izquierdo and his

associates for undermining the U.S. Spanish-language exhibition industry or for pirating its own films [48, p.213].

As the influence of both Mexican films and Spanish-language exhibition dwindled, Hollywood studios no longer had direct competition for Spanish-speaking Latinos. However, Hollywood's marketing departments were still generally ill equipped to effectively reach this niche audience. Consequently, the studios consequently began to hire companies like Spanish Connections (merger with the Carranza Group) and the Arenas Group to assist in a film's promotional campaign. Spanish Connections translated standard studio press kits for films like *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *Dirty Dancing* (1987) in order to specifically convert these publicity supplies for Latino media [49]. It also tailored electronic press kits (EPKs) for Spanish-language media outlets [49]. More importantly, they translated press kits for up to two hundred Spanish-language and bilingual publications with the ability to reach millions of readers [50]. The company also wrote a weekly newspaper column, "Hablando De Hollywood" and produced a short radio program, "Ojos Y Oidos De Hollywood," which highlighted client films [49]. Prior to Spanish Connections, many Spanish-language media outlets did not have an entertainment section [49]. Former President Dennis McCann, one of the pioneers of Spanish-language marketing for motion pictures, stated "none of the studios were not being serviced by [a company that] could provide them with a Spanish-language campaign. They did not have adequate Spanish-language press kits or electronic press kits" (D. McCann, personal communication, July 2, 2003).

Similar to Spanish Connection, The Arenas Group made media buys and publicized English-language movies to Spanish-speaking and bilingual Latinos. This marketer began to develop specialized Spanish-language marketing campaigns for mainstream films. For example, in *An American Tail*, the general marketing campaign advertised it as film about "a lost kid looking for his parent" [51]. For its Latino marketing campaign, it was sold as a film about "a family of immigrants who came to the city looking for a better life" [51]. These campaigns included Spanish-language prints. Santiago Pozo, the current CEO of Arenas, asserted that Spanish-language prints would increase a film's box office, because it would increase a publicity campaign's reach [52]. He pointed out the importance of marketing a film in Spanish-language media (S. Pozo, personal communication, July 8,2003).

> We started applying Spanish-language media as an additional marketing tool to market English-language film. [The assumption that] this audience that you are reaching are not going to see a film in English is wrong. They are going to see a film in English. Now, they are not going to watch a film in English when they have not been motivated properly. Maybe, they are also exposed to English-language media, but that you are reaching them in English-language media does not mean that you are motivating them or pushing their emotional buttons that you need to push in order to get an immediate response.

While these two companies agreed on the importance of a good Spanish language advertising and publicity campaign, these two marketing experts took different philosophies in order to build their respective businesses. Pozo began his business by focusing on the new arrivals, because he contended that that they were easier to reach (Santiago Pozo, personal communication, July 8, 2003). Santiago Pozo of The Arenas Group, who pioneered Hollywood's trend of simultaneously releasing English and Spanish-language prints for U.S Latinos, was apparently a firm supporter of producing

these prints [53]. However, Pozo asserted that it was important to build its business by pointing out the importance of Spanish-language prints (personal communication, July 8, 2003).

> What I found out was that the Spanish-language prints were the tip of the iceberg, but the grosses created by Latinos in English-language prints were the iceberg – and a big part of the iceberg is below the water. You do not see it. However, at that time, in order to build my budgets at Universal and build the credibility of the market, I had to concentrate on this, because that is the only thing that was visible.

On the other hand, Dennis McCann of The Carranza Group contended Spanish-language prints were not a worthwhile expenditure for a Hollywood distributor [52]. He believed that Latinos prefer to watch a film in English [52]. McCann explained why the type of print is not that important with Latino audiences (personal communication, July 2, 2003).

> The studios already tried dubbing and subtitling. It has not been that successful. It is not necessary. I think it is more important to have a good Spanish-language marketing and publicity campaign. They will go to the movie, because they are being appealed to in their language.

These two dissimilar philosophies from Latino marketing experts illustrate how difficult it was for Spanish-language marketers to develop their businesses. Marketers were attempting to develop a standard and effective advertising and distribution plan for both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking Latinos, a niche market that had been historically understudied by studio marketers.

Latino marketing experts also could not agree on the profile of this niche market. Luis Buroncular, president of Hispanic Entertainment Specialists, says, “To be successful in the Hispanic market you must have major Hispanic actors or the actors Sylvester

Stallone, Charles Bronson, Clint Eastwood or Chuck Norris" [2]. Santiago Pozo, the former director of special markets for Universal Studios, agreed that action filled movies tend to work well with Latino moviegoers, but he contended that this represented only "a fraction of the Latino universe: Males 18 to 30 years of age with less than five years' stay in the country" [53]. In addition, he pointed out that Universal completed some research on the Latino market; this study indicated that Latinos go to the movies in large family groups [35]. More importantly, Pozo pointed out that Latinos tend to be concentrated in many of the key U.S. markets, such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, which often determine box office success [35]. However, Pozo suggested that Latinos changed their moviegoing habits from attending Spanish-language versions of a film to English when the acculturation process began to take place. He believed this typically took place after living in the United States for five years [53].

Dennis McCann believed that a huge problem is that film executives did not perceive the Spanish-language market as a potentially profitable niche market, so they created a no-win situation for Spanish-language publicity and marketing campaigns with their lack of monetary support (personal communication, July 2, 2003). Despite a growing population, McCann says, "Executives did not take the market seriously. They still do not take it as seriously as they should. For example, the studios only invested about one-half of one percent on Spanish-language publicity campaigns" (personal communication, July 2, 2003). Furthermore, he believed that the corporate culture of the film business created a climate where marketing executives are scared to take chances on

new or different campaigns, because they did not want to lose their jobs (D. McCann, personal communication, July 2, 2003).

Pozo also agreed that the Spanish-language market was underserved. However, he believed that the problem was in distribution. The distribution problem in Spanish-language neighborhoods was twofold. First, Hollywood films were not getting their films into vital theaters near Spanish-speaking neighborhoods; because there was a perception that these audiences did not go to Hollywood films (S. Pozo, personal communication, July 8, 2003). Next, these exhibitors catered specifically to Mexican film distributors. They did not want Hollywood films, since they believed that their audiences were more interested in *La India Maria* (S. Pozo, personal communication, July 8, 2003). Consequently, Pozo argued that where the film was exhibited was even more important than the language of the print.

The marketplace of the late 1980s provided U.S. Latino films with more potential marketing outlets ranging from Spanish-language programming that focused on English-language films to development of English-language Latino magazines. Though studios were not investing a great deal of money into Spanish-language campaigns, these distributors did begin to develop Spanish-language electronic press kits for their films' marketing campaigns. In addition, a U.S. Latino film distributor no longer had to be concerned about competing on a consistent basis with the Mexican film industry for a similar niche audience. The Mexican government did not provide its filmmakers with enough production capital to produce quality films in order to compete effectively with U.S. Latino films. More importantly, Spanish-language marketing firms like The Arenas

Group worked diligently to prove to Hollywood studios that U.S. Latinos were a viable niche market by attempting to develop a market profile for this group, which increased the likelihood that Hollywood studios would begin to incorporate more U.S. Latino films within their distribution slates.

The Promotion of Late 1980s U.S. Latino Films

The U.S. Latino films circulated in the late 1980s epitomized a general trend within the motion picture distribution industry in which independent films typically did not perform well at the box office. Unlike the early 1980s when small independent distributors could afford to widely or regionally release U.S. Latino films such as, *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*, *El Norte*, or *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, because there was a demand for as well as a shortage of films. These U.S. Latino films encountered a drastically different marketplace. Independently financed films had to increasingly depend on studio distributors, because small film distributors did not have the overhead to absorb the escalating cost of acquiring, promoting, and distributing motion pictures. The film distribution arena became so competitive and glutted with product that if a major Hollywood studio did not acquire an independent motion picture, this film would most likely not receive any theatrical distribution or receive limited distribution from a small independent distributor that did not have the finances to secure a large number of screens. In this section, I will provide a brief overview of how distributors of U.S. Latino films promoted and released these motion pictures within the late 1980s marketplace.

Universal released *Born in East L.A.* (1987), a film about Rudy's (Cheech Marin) struggle to return to the United States, after the Immigration Nationalization Service

(INS) mistakenly deports him. Outside of Cheech Marin, who starred in the highly successful Cheech & Chong films, *Born in East L.A.* did not have a highly marketable cast that the distributor could effectively promote to a mainstream audience. As a result, the distributor focused on the Latino market. Universal's Santiago Pozo, who coordinated the Spanish-language marketing campaign for *Born in East L.A.*, stated that this motion picture represented one of the first times that a Hollywood studio went after the Latino market by utilizing both the English and Spanish-language media (personal communication, July 8, 2003). The distributor spent a great deal of money on outdoor and print advertising that targeted Latinos in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Miami, and throughout the state of Texas [54].

Universal Pictures utilized a similar distribution strategy with *Born in East L.A.* that was implemented by Columbia Pictures' *La Bamba*, but on a smaller scale [54]. The distributor simultaneously released twenty-five Spanish-language subtitled and dubbed prints on its opening week [54]. These prints generated $180,000 or $7,500 per screen average, which doubled the per-screen average of English-language prints [54]. The Spanish-language prints were particularly successful in Los Angeles' thirteen theaters, where these prints produced a box office of $118,426 or an average of $9,109 [54]. Among these theaters, the Orpheum Theater had the highest box office gross in the nation. The cumulative box office of these Spanish-language theaters represented 33% of the total Los Angeles box office [54]. Overall, the motion picture opened strongly by earning $6 million on 1100 screens, but afterwards the film did not come close to matching its first week's box office figures. The film earned a respectable $17.3 million

over a five-week theatrical release. Universal most likely earned a solid profit, because *Born in East L.A.* only cost a little over $5 million to produce.

Universal Pictures again attempted to target U.S. Latino moviegoers with *The Milagro Beanfield War*, a motion picture that describes the escalating struggle revolving around water between the citizens of Milagro, New Mexico and rich land developer Ladd Devine (Richard Bradford)[55, 56]. Prior to being released, *The Milagro Beanfield War* received negative press. Leo Guerra, president of the Film and Television Minorities Committee and an assistant film editor on the film, criticized director Robert Redford and producer Moctesuma Esparza for implementing Latino stereotypes and cultural inaccuracies [57]. In addition, Redford ran into problems when he attempted to shoot the film in the town of Chimayo. Community leaders were opposed to having a Hollywood film crew in their little town and did not relent, despite Redford's best efforts [55]. He consequently had to find another location in the town of Chimayo, but it was high in the mountains [55]. The winter snows came early and Redford had to shut down production [55].

These problems delayed the release of *The Milagro Beanfield War*. It also pushed this film far over budget. Perhaps, more importantly, the delay affected Universal's marketing campaign. Originally, it was slated as a Christmas season film [58]. These films typically receive a high-profile Oscar campaign [58]. However, the postponement made the film a late spring release. This put *The Milagro Beanfield War* at a distinct disadvantage, because the film did not have a notable star to divert moviegoers from the other late spring and early summer studio blockbusters that often cast big-name stars.

Nevertheless, the studio planned to promote its film to Spanish-speaking moviegoers through Spanish-language advertisements, press kits, and featuring principal individuals in the production process [35].

Santiago Pozo spent approximately $300,000 on Universal's Latino marketing campaign [51]. He attempted to sell the film to Latino audiences by promoting the Latino pride aspects of the film. His slogan for *The Milagro Beanfield War* was "Sienta el orogullo de se Hispano" (Feel the pride to be Hispanic) (S. Pozo, personal communication, July 8, 2003). Furthermore, Universal Pictures made an effort to expose Latinos to the film through word-of-mouth screenings and media coverage [59]. About two weeks after the film's general release, the distributor released seventeen Spanish-language prints to Latino markets [52]. After a few weeks, the distributor estimated that these prints earned a box office of $185,000 [59].

In terms of its general market release, Universal Pictures slowly expanded *The Milagro Beanfield War* in a platform style. The film premiered on only three screens and earned a box office of $79,492. On the following week, the distributor expanded the number to five prints and generated an impressive box office of $153, 415. Universal expanded the number of screens to 135 for the next two-weeks, along with some Spanish-language prints. *The Milagro Beanfield War* earned over a $1 million at the box office for each week. It kept on expanding the number of screens until it reached a high of 437 screens on its 7th week. However, the film's most lucrative weekly box office was $1.9 million on its 6th week. The film had a fairly long theatrical run of 15 weeks with a cumulative box office of nearly $14 million. In spite of its respectable box office, the

film was financial disappointment considering production costs were estimated at around $24 million.

Moctesuma Esparza, the film's producer, contended that Universal Pictures did spend a considerable amount of money on both the English-language and Spanish-language marketing campaigns. However, Esparza believed that the negative press that Robert Redford received throughout the film's production hurt the motion picture and the film's ultimate box office. He cited that the Latino community and the Anglo community received the film differently. While on the one hand, the Latino community embraced the film. On the other, the film did not resonate with Anglo audiences, who often respond to a film when it receives a positive review from a critic. Esparza describes why Universal Pictures promoted *The Milagro Beanfield War* as an art film (personal communication, August 13, 2002).

> It got marketed more as a specialty art film by the studio. It was the strength of Robert Redford that caused them to spend money, because they did not really feel that it was going to a mainstream/broad release movie.

Esparza also asserted that the film was hurt by the lack of positive reviews in comparison to Redford's previous film *Ordinary People* (1980). The lack of a positive word-of-mouth from film critics caused the studio to scale down its promotional campaign a little (M. Esparaza, personal communication, August 13, 2002). Despite the lack of positive reviews, Esparza felt that Universal spent a respectable amount of money in support of the film.

While Esparza was satisfied with the studio's financial backing, Santiago Pozo believed that the film's publicity campaign focused too much of its attention on the

"pride issue." Pozo contends that Latinos, just like any other moviegoers, want to be entertained and not because a film may be good for them (personal communication, July 8, 2003). That is why "Feel the Pride to be Hispanic" did not work with Latino audiences. He cited that where he was pushing the motion picture, the film had a lower per screen average than the general campaign. Even, the Spanish-language prints that were simultaneously released did not resonate with Latinos (S. Pozo, personal communication, July 8, 2003).

An emerging mini-major, The Cannon Group, attempted to cultivate Latino audiences by producing a film that featured former Menudo group member Bobby Rosas. *Salsa* (1988) essentially represented the Latino version of another successful independent film musical, *Dirty Dancing* [60]. The film was about Rico (Bobby Rosas) who is determined to win a local salsa contest by getting a new partner named Luna (Miranda Garrison, who was the "Queen of Salsa" [60, 61]. The Cannon Group hired Art Brambila as a market consultant to effectively target Latino moviegoers in Los Angeles [62]. Part of the marketing campaign revolved around the star power of Robby Rosa who was part of Menudo, a popular Puerto Rican group. Menudo was a huge phenomenon in the 1980s. This young singing group was extremely popular with young Latina girls.

Another element of the film's promotional strategy was putting together a soundtrack that included huge Latino musical stars such as Celia Cruz and Tito Puente to target this demographic [62]. Mark Pritchard, the marketing vice resident of Cannon, claimed that, "Salsa focuses on the hot dance sound that is so very popular among America's Latinos. We feel it is important to target this huge and lucrative demographic"

[62]. Lastly, the Cannon Group also directed *Salsa's* marketing and publicity campaign to both mainstream and Latino media outlets [62].

The Cannon Group broadly debuted the film on 1,125 screens and it grossed over $3 million at the box office. This release also included 21 Spanish-language prints in the Los Angeles area and New York. The majority of these prints were circulated in Southern California. On the following week, the Cannon Group secured over 1,000 screens and earned a box office of over $2 million. After two strong weeks, the distributor quickly reduced the scale of its release. *Salsa* had an eight-week theatrical run, earning $8.6 at the box office.

Two independent distributors, Platform Releasing (*Break of Dawn*) and Cineworld (*The Pentient*), illustrated the difficulty that smaller distributors of U.S. Latino films encountered in securing screens for their motion pictures within the late 1980s marketplace. *Break of Dawn* was a film about the life of Pedro Gonzalez (Oscar Chavez), who not only was the first Latino radio host in Los Angeles, but also was an influential voice in the community [63]. However, his political radio show eventually gets him into trouble with District Attorney Kyle Mitchell (Peter Henry Schroeder) and an aspiring Latino chief of police (Tony Plana), who frame him for raping a minor in order to keep him quiet [64]. No Hollywood distributor picked up *Break of Dawn*, primarily because it was a bilingual film [65]. In addition, the film did not feature a commercial star. Oscar Chavez, who starred in the film, was a Mexican actor. After a year of private screenings and film festivals, a few distributors offered to spend a little bit of money in distributing the film [65]. However, the filmmakers did not feel comfortable

with any of the deals, given that they did not believe these distributors would put much effort into promoting this film [65].

The producers decided to self-distribute *Break of Dawn* by forming Platform Releasing and struck five prints of the film [65]. They released one English-language print at the Nuart Theater in West Los Angeles. The film grossed $7,500 at this theater in a single week. In addition, the distributor dispersed four Spanish-language prints among Spanish-language theaters [65]. The film's box office is unclear. I was unable to locate box office figures of the four Spanish-language prints.

Another independent film, *The Pentient*, was a hybrid U.S. Latino film that centered on a love triangle that takes place in a small Mexican town between Ramon (Raul Julia), Celia (Rona Freed), and Juan (Armand Assante) [66]. The little settlement is ruled by a religious cult where members of this sect recreate the crucifixion of Jesus named "The Pentient" that often results in death for the individual [66]. The town members have asked Ramon to be "The Pentient" [66]. The film had an unusual subject matter about an obscure religious group. The *Pentient's* cast did have some name recognition. Raul Julia had co-starred in *Moon Over Parador* and had a significant role in *Tequila Sunrise*. However, CineWorld opted not to widely circulate *The Pentient*. The film received limited distribution only in New York and Los Angeles.

In 1989, a U.S. Latino film emerged from an unlikely source. With the backing of the Catholic Church, Paulist Pictures produced *Romero* (1989), a motion picture that describes the evolution of Archbishop Oscar Romero from a passive man to a person who becomes a strong advocate for the persecuted and critical of the rich families and the

military [67]. His outspoken nature led to his death when he was assassinated while conducting mass on March 24, 1980. Four Seasons, the film's distributors, did not have the luxury of having a marketable cast. Raul Julia was the actor with the most name recognition. However, his recent films like *The Pentient* were not box office successes.

Without a bankable star, the distributor attempted to build a word-of-mouth campaign through a series of benefit showings [68]. These screenings served as fund-raisers for a wide variety of organizations [68]. Four Seasons hired the Carranza Group to advise it on how to effectively target the Latino market [69]. *Romero* was not dubbed because these prints were too expensive [69]. Another reason for not dubbing the film in Spanish was that the distributor did not intend to release the film in Spanish-language theaters [69]. The distributor finally decided to circulate prints that were subtitled in Spanish [69]. Both the distributor and Carranza Group apparently were against releasing the film in Spanish-language theaters. T.C. Rice described these as "ruined theaters where exploitation Spanish-language movies are being presented" [69]. Furthermore, Dennis McCann, an executive of the Carranza Group, defended this decision by saying, "to go to these theaters [would be] diminishing the image of the quality of the film" [69].

The distributor implemented a standard platform release pattern with the intention of securing screens in mainstream theaters [68]. Reverend Ellwood E. Keiser insisted, "the picture is a mainstream fare and commercial, not an art film to be relegated to the cult or offbeat ghetto" [68]. Despite these assertions, *Romero* received only limited distribution throughout its theatrical run. The distributor slowly expanded the release of the film until it reached a high of 51 screens on its 6th week. After reducing the scope of

its release, *Romero* had its most successful week on its 8th week where film earned $194,487 on 29 prints. *Romero* eventually produced a box office of a little over $1.3 million in its thirteen-week theatrical run.

Most of the films in this era targeted Spanish-language audiences by releasing Spanish-language prints. The Spanish-language campaign for *Born in East L.A.* was by far the most lucrative. Universal simultaneously released Spanish-language prints in order to take advantage of the "buzz" created by the Spanish-language and general market campaign. Spanish-speaking Latinos in Los Angeles came out in large numbers to watch this film. On the other hand, Universal implemented a slightly different plan with *The Milagro Beanfield War*. The studio did not release Spanish-language prints until its third week, which did not give these prints the opportunity to benefit from the general market campaign. Although *The Milagro Beanfield War* generated fairly high box-office grosses for a short period of time, it did not match the success of *Born in East L.A.* On the other hand, the success of Spanish-language campaigns for *Salsa* and *Break of Dawn* are unclear, because these distributors did not release any box office figures for these prints. The distributors of *Romero* released subtitled Spanish-language prints. But, they did not release Spanish-language prints, because this film was not going to be released in Spanish-language theaters. Furthermore, the distributor did not like the rundown conditions of most Spanish-language exhibitors. The distributor of *The Penitent* apparently did not attempt to secure many English-language or Spanish-language screens.

The two U.S. Latino films, *Born in East L.A* and *The Milagro Beanfield War,* that were distributed by the studios did fairly well considering neither picture had a

marketable cast. Universal Pictures implemented different distribution plans for these two films. For *Born in East L.A.*, the studio targeted Mexican-American moviegoers by debuting the film on May 5th, a historic day in Mexican history in the primarily Mexican-American city of San Antonio. The film was also very popular in Los Angeles, another city with many Mexican-American moviegoers. The distributor widely released the film along with Spanish-language prints with good success over a two-week period. In contrast, Universal utilized a platform release for *The Milagro Beanfield War* by slowly expanding the number of prints. The studio also did not simultaneously release its Spanish-language prints with its English-language prints. The delayed release of the Spanish-language prints may have been a contributing factor to the distributor's inability to successfully target Latinos for this film. On the other hand, the message of the film may have been too serious for this audience.

The independent U.S. Latino films of this era primarily struggled in securing screens. *The Penitent* and *Break of Dawn* were not acquired by major distributors and did not receive wide distribution. *Salsa* attempted to take advantage of the star power of a Spanish-speaking singer Bobby Rosas in order to target of Spanish-speaking moviegoers. In addition, the distributor attempted to appeal to fans of *Dirty Dancing* by debuting another film that also centered on a similar subject matter. The film did fairly well for a few weeks, but did not come close in matching *Dirty Dancing's* success. Lastly, *Romero* tried to resonate with mainstream audiences. The distributor shunned Spanish-language theaters by not producing Spanish-language prints. This decision was perhaps a mistake, because the subject matter may well had resonated with many Central

American moviegoers who had recently fled their countries due to civil wars and political strife. Four Seasons could have implemented a distribution plan similar to *El Norte*, where it first built an art film audience on the East Coast before attempting to target Spanish-language audiences. The distributor overlooked one of its core audiences, who most likely would have gone to Spanish-language theaters, by trying to appeal strictly to mainstream audiences.

Case Studies

While most of U.S. Latino films struggled in the marketplace of the late 1980s, a pair of motion pictures, *La Bamba* and *Stand and Deliver*, emerged as box-office successes. *La Bamba* was one of the surprise hits of 1987. *Stand and Deliver* was a moderate box-office success but was critically acclaimed and earned Edward James Olmos an Academy Award nomination. Both of these films are often used as examples to illustrate the box-office potential of this niche market. *La Bamba* and *Stand and Deliver* were acquired and circulated by Hollywood distributors. Although the cast of both of these films was relatively unknown, the studios utilized music and education themes to sell these films to mainstream audiences.

The following two case studies are the signature U.S. Latino films of the late 1980s. *La Bamba* took advantage of a huge built in audience of music lovers, who were familiar with the song and the tragic death of the singer. This film was Columbia Pictures first major venture into the Latino market. This studio made some savvy marketing decisions, for instance resurrecting the infamous song. On the other hand, *Stand and Deliver* was the first Warner Bros. film to implement an aggressive Spanish-

language marketing campaign. Their respective marketing campaigns were also extremely effective in attracting diverse audiences beyond U.S. Latinos.

La Bamba

La Bamba chronicles the meteoric rise and tragic death of Richie Valens (Lou Diamond Phillips), a young rock star, who died at the age of 17 in a plane crash that also took the life of Buddy Holly. Prior to the release of the film, the filmmaker Luis Valdez confidently contended that *La Bamba* would be equally attractive to both Latino and mainstream audiences. The film starred the little-known actors Lou Diamond Phillips and Esai Morales and was about a Mexican-American singer, but Valdez believed that *La Bamba* was a universal story [70]. He pointed out why Richie Valen's desire to reach for his dreams would resonate with most American audiences [71].

> Ritchie achieved it [success], and his story will make sense to anybody who has ever wanted to achieve something, which is just about everybody on the face of the earth. Everybody can understand the elements of Ritchie's life, a poor kid who basically wanted to help his family. And that's exactly what he did. I didn't distort the truth or sweeten it in any way whatsoever. I just took it as it was, and I found it to be quite admirable. Nevertheless, it's the values in the experience that have connected with other audiences. I think that Hispanics relate to the same values. Everybody who has come to the United States for one reason or another has come for the same reason. They've come to work, they've come to improve their lot in life, they've come to do something for their kids, and this is what the movie's saying.

After Columbia Pictures acquired the film, David Forbes, a marketing consultant, concluded that there had to be a Hispanic market for this movie. When he began his research, Forbes discovered that all the Hollywood studios under researched the Latino market. He stated that, "no one knew how to market, where to advertise, whether you needed to create a separate campaign, or could you just translate it" (David Forbes,

personal communication, February 4, 2003). Forbes studied the Spanish-language market a great deal by attending Spanish-language theater conventions and speaking to various agencies that specialized in this market. After his investigation, Forbes discovered that this ethnic group would be an extremely difficult segment of the population to target effectively and described the nuances and the difficulties involved (personal communication, February 4, 2003).

> I began to understand that [the Latino market] was a very mixed bag. There were two audiences – a teenage audience. They also went to the movies as family units. Sundays and Mondays were busy days. They did not have a lot of money to spend, so concession became an issue and ticket prices became an issue. Theaters that catered to a Hispanic market allowed children to get in free. You were allowed to bring food into the theaters. The theaters were also not [well]-equipped. It was all compounded by the fact that it was always six months later before they got a dubbed or subtitled version. Some areas you need to have a dubbed version and other areas you needed a subtitled version. In some areas, you needed both versions. There were lots of issues.

David Forbes' research resulted in the following recommendations for *La Bamba's* distribution and marketing plan [72]. This proposal included dubbing the motion picture with the original cast [72]. He also recommended that the distributor complete a Spanish-language advertising campaign and to release simultaneously with Spanish-language and subtitled prints [72]. This was a unique proposal, because most Hollywood distributors made Spanish-language prints available to audiences long after the film's theatrical run [73]. In addition, Columbia Pictures planned a direct mail promotion for zip codes in Latino areas [72]. The distributor also tailored a Latino marketing strategy by highlighting Valen's accomplishments, such as, "He bought his mother a house" [38].

Coca-Cola, the corporate owner of Columbia, became a vital supporter of the film. This organization energetically promoted *La Bamba* through in-store campaign [74]. Coca-Cola marketers considered a $50,000 consumer sweepstakes and special screenings for Latino area stores [35]. The company also planned to sponsor a *La Bamba* tour that featured Carlos Santana and Los Lobos [72]. The film's advertising campaign attempted to take advantage of the Coca-Cola's significant shelf space in supermarkets and advertising strength by placing promotion materials.

The synergy between Coke and Columbia Pictures was also evident in media planning for the film. Ogilvy and Mather, Columbia's agency, placed all the spot advertisements and network radio [75]. Oglivy also made cable buys on the USA Network and WTBS [75]. However before implementing the *La Bamba* advertising plan, Oglivy and Mather hired Bermudez Associates as Latino market consultants [37]. The advertising agency bought time on Univision and Telemundo, the two Spanish-language networks. In addition, the advertising agency launched a Spanish-language campaign for the distributor that included radio, print, billboard, movie and television trailers [36]. David Forbes described Columbia Picture's Spanish-language campaign (personal communication, February 4, 2003).

> We did mostly radio and out-door, specifically billboards and buses. We did this in all the major markets in areas with a high density of Spanish-speaking people. We did do trailers and put them in theaters where there was a high density of Hispanic neighborhoods. We did the trailers in English and in Spanish.

Flatie, a vice president and management supervisor at Ogilvy stated that 5% of the total advertising budget was specifically targeted at the Latino market [75]. On the other hand,

McCann-Erickson, Coca-Cola's agency, bought network television [75]. The advertising agency used Coke's significant buying clout to secure a great deal of time [75]. It obtained spots on a wide variety of televised programs ranging from *Late Night With David Letterman* to daytime soap operas [75]. Through the efforts of its two advertising agencies, the distributor aggressively promoted the motion picture in 50 major Anglo markets around the country and simultaneously advertised the film in 15 key Latino markets [76].

La Bamba also took advantage of an unprecedented amount of free publicity it received from the mainstream media. *Newsweek* did a story on Hispanic Hollywood that featured the film. *Time* magazine wrote a lengthy, but negative review. *The New York Times* gave it an excellent review and continued to write several articles about the motion picture. Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times* gave the film a good review. These articles allowed the motion picture to remain visible with potential moviegoers. Trade publications like *Variety* gave *La Bamba* an excellent review. On the other hand, the *Los Angeles Times*, the newspaper that is read by a large number of Mexican-Americans, only gave the film a fair review. Beyond the vast amounts of free publicity the film acquired, Columbia Pictures prescreened the film to a diverse number of groups including Latino organizations, youth groups, high schools and colleges to generate a positive word of mouth for *La Bamba* [76]. The distributor even prescreened the film to a high school newspaper writers conference in Portland, Oregon [76].

Prior to the release of the film, Valen's hit song *La Bamba* was re-released by Los Lobos and quickly shot up the charts. The success of the song essentially gave the film

an additional boost, because the name of the song and the film were identical [75]. In addition, the distributor paid for and organized a MTV party that was aired on different occasions [76]. The MTV Special featured Los Lobos and other performers from the soundtrack [77]. The MTV program ensured that performers on the *La Bamba* soundtrack would most likely get their videos played on a high-rotation by V-Js, which ensured more free publicity for the motion picture [77].

Columbia Pictures concurrently circulated *La Bamba* in three different versions Spanish, English, and English with Spanish subtitles [2]. It distributed 64 Spanish-language dubbed prints and 13 subtitled prints, which represented a much higher figure than most Hollywood films [72]. Nearly half of these prints were dispersed in one of the largest Latino areas in the country, Southern California [73]. These Spanish-language prints were a hit with Latino audiences and generated about 10% of the overall box office [38]. Despite the fact that Spanish-language theaters charged $2 less in admission prices than mainstream theaters, these theaters generated a higher per screen average than English language theaters [38]. These theaters earned an average of over $5,000 per print compared to $4,500 for mainstream exhibitors [78]. These figures were impressive considering the distributor only spent $200,000 on its initial Latino marketing campaign [38]. Overall, Spanish-language theaters generated a box office of over $2.5 million [55].

David Forbes described how Columbia Pictures worked with the exhibitors in order to attract more Spanish-speaking Latinos (personal communication, February 4, 2003).

> We were able to convince exhibitors to run a dubbed or subtitled version and gave them the parameters in which to work with. We told them that

> we would spend some money on marketing, if they would make some screens available. We encouraged the theaters to advertise and post signs saying that they spoke Spanish. We told them they could make adjustments on Sundays and Mondays on ticket prices and give discounts.

La Bamba had a theatrical run of 14 weeks. It grossed over $5 million at over 1250 screens in its first three days [75]. During its first week, it generated a box office of over $9.1 million. Its second week box office of $8.3 million on over 1200 screens was almost equally impressive. Columbia Pictures continued to aggressively secure screens for *La Bamba*. Over its initial 10-week period, the film was exhibited in over 1000 screens. The motion picture earned more than $1 million for twelve consecutive weeks. *La Bamba* eventually generated a box office of over $53 million. The film was quite profitable for Columbia Pictures, since it only cost $6.5 million to produce. At the time, *La Bamba* was the highest grossing U.S. Latino film in Hollywood history.

In retrospect, publicist Luis Reyes describes why he believes *La Bamba* has been one of the few Latino breakthrough films (personal communication, March 1, 2003).

> It was really an American story. It was a story of a rock 'n' roll singer. Everybody related to that. The film was well done. It was marketed well. Coca-Cola had Columbia Pictures. It had the music. All the elements were there. It was one of the few times that everyone worked together. There was a synergy there at that time at the studio. Between Coca-Cola, the music department, the film, the marketing department, everything worked together beautifully on that film. All the elements were there for success.

Stand and Deliver

Stand and Deliver highlights the efforts of Jaime Escalante (Edward James Olmos), a Garfield High School teacher, who teaches a record number of Latino students to pass the Advance Placement College Calculus Examination. The film's cast was

arguably the most commercial group of actors that had been assembled to star in a U.S. Latino film. The motion picture featured both Edward James Olmos and Lou Diamond Phillips. Both of these actors were well known to both Latino and mainstream audiences. Edward James Olmos was perhaps the actor with the most name recognition within the Latino community. He previously had starred in *Zoot Suit* and *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*. However, Edward James Olmos' career took off when he appeared as Lieutenant Martin Castillo in the extremely popular television series *Miami Vice* (1984-1989). Lou Diamond Phillips had also just completed starring in the highly successful *La Bamba*.

Warners Bros. prescreened *Stand and Deliver* in Sherman Oaks, California and Seattle, Washington [79, p.211]. Despite the fact, these were two different markets the film was received positively [79, p.211]. Nevertheless, Warner Bros. remained troubled with the original film title *Walking on Water*, because it felt that teenagers would not be attracted to a motion picture with this particular name, which was the primary target market [79, p. 211]. Luis Reyes stated why Warner Bros. did not like the original film title (personal communication, March 1,2003).

> Warner Bros. said it sounded like a religious movie. They did not want to confuse the issue. So they tested the title. They did not really like the title, but no one could come up with a better one than *Stand and Deliver* and they did not like *Walking on Water*. They decide to go with *Stand and Deliver*, because it noted some kind of action, some sort of heroic people standing up and delivering something. So they went with *Stand and Deliver* (L. Reyes, personal communication, March 1, 2003).

In addition, Warner Bros. changed the original title to *Stand and Deliver*, because it felt would resonate better with teen audiences [79, p. 211]. The title came from a Mr. Mister song. Warner Bros. optioned the song as part of tie-in strategy.

After coming up with a film title, Warner Bros. conducted a massive publicity plan that included over 200 screenings. These screenings included word-of-mouth and opinion maker screenings with mainstream and Latino political organizations (L. Reyes, personal communication, March 1, 2003). The distributor also did special screenings for kids and students (L. Reyes, personal communication, March 1, 2003). The distributor targeted English and Spanish-language media outlets with a publicity campaign [79, p.212]. The distributor provided Spanish-language media outlets Telemundo and Univision with Spanish-language dubbed film excerpts [79, p.214].

The major star of the film Edward James Olmos was actively involved in promoting the film by conducting interviews with critics, editors, and journals in all the markets [79, p.213]. In addition, the stars participated in promotional tours. For example, Luis Reyes stated that, "Edward James Olmos went to all the major markets. He really pushed the movie. Eddie is good at that. We stood in front of the theater and screenings" (L. Reyes, personal communication, March 1, 2003). Another boost to Warner Bros. publicity campaign was a photograph of President Ronald Reagan and Jaime Escalante [79, p.213].

Larry Bershon and Bill Duke at Arco also were extremely supportive of the motion picture (B. Hoffman, personal communication, March 4, 2003). They provided the film with important development funds in order to complete *Stand and Deliver*. They granted Bob Hoffman with some initial money so he could conduct his publicity campaign. Arco also got involved in the marketing campaign. They promoted the

motion picture at Arco's AM/PM mini-markets (B. Hoffman, personal communication, March 4, 2003).

Pepsi sponsored a *Stand and Deliver* study guide that was distributed through *Fast Times*, a student magazine [79, p.213]. Warner Bros. estimated that this magazine reached over a million students [79, p.213]. Warner Bros. did tie-ins with various school math and science programs (L. Reyes, personal communication, March 4, 2003). Another attempt to reach the teen demographics, the *Stand and Deliver* song was produced as a video [79, p.214]. Music Television (MTV) and other media outlets featured the song [79, p.214]. Beyond a high profile media campaign, Warner Bros hired a "community outreach team" [79, p.214]. The principal objective of the team was to meet with Latino groups and visit communities to mobilize support within this niche audience. Luis Reyes describes how the team developed support within the Latino community. "We did major grassroots campaigns all across the United States with all the different groups that me and Eddie Olmos had worked with throughout the years. We also sent postcards and mailings" (L. Reyes, personal communication, March 1, 2003. Warner Bros. planned to simultaneously release 30-35 dubbed and subtitled Spanish-language prints [51].

While Warner Bros. was supportive of *Stand and Deliver's* grassroots marketing efforts, Danny Haro contends that their campaign did not always work well within the studio formula (personal communication, March 29, 2003). For example, he had to coordinate everything with the field representatives, who were often juggling many films simultaneously, including the distribution of free movie tickets. Haro describes the

difficulty he had working within these confines (personal communication, March 29, 2003).

> I had to be very careful that I was not stepping on other people's toes. They were the veterans. I was the rookie. I had to make sure that I worked with their field reps. I would suggest things. But, I was working for them. They were not working for me.

Prior to being launched, *Stand and Deliver* received a great deal of acclaim from a wide variety of mainstream newspapers, magazines, and trade publications like *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Variety*. *Stand and Deliver*, contrary to many films of this era, did not premiere in New York City. The motion picture debuted in thirty Los Angeles theaters to take advantage of its large Mexican-American population [79, p.217]. Its Spanish-language print in Metropolitan's Orpheum Theater was successful [51]. It generated a box office of nearly $29,000 in its initial week [51]. In the following week, the film opened in New York City. During its New York run, *The New York Times* ran a second story on the film. The city's diverse audience received *Stand and Deliver* positively [79, p.218]. The motion picture earned its highest average box office in a New York theater (B. Hoffman, personal communication, March 4, 2003). In early April, Warner Bros. conducted more sneak previews throughout North America. The audience's response from these various markets tended to be favorable [79, p.219]. By late April, *Stand and Deliver* had grossed over $4 million in five markets – Los Angeles, New York City, San Francisco, Texas, and Miami [79, p.219]. The motion picture's box office was impressive, because it spent under $200,000 for media placements [79, p.219].

Stand and Deliver had a 12-week theatrical run and was the first Warner Bros. film to be dubbed and promoted heavily in the Spanish-language media [80]. The distributor slowly dispersed the film in a platform release style. The film debuted on 30 screens and earned a box office of $535,140. Warner Bros. expanded the number of prints to 60 for the next two weeks. The film earned a box office $792,303 on its second week and $966,058 on its third week. On the fourth week, Warner Bros. boosted the number of prints to 288, which generated a box office of nearly $1.6 million. After a slight decrease in the number of prints on its 5th week, Warner Bros. broadened its release on its 6th week to 444 theaters and earned a box office of $1.7 million. Although Warner Bros. continued to push the film over the next several weeks, this box office figure would represent its highest box office total. *Stand and Deliver's* broadest release reached 472 screens on its 11th week, but its box office was only $736,858. *Stand and Deliver* ultimately generated a box office of nearly $14 million. Warner Bros. earned an excellent profit from this project, because the film only $1.3 million to produce.

Despite the success of the film in Los Angeles and other markets, *Stand and Deliver* did not perform well in Miami. The Miami box office receipts were only one-third of box office receipts of Los Angeles and New York [59]. These figures disappointed Warner Bros., because Edward James Olmos, the star of the film, had a high profile in the city [59]. In addition, he spent a great deal of time promoting the film in Miami [59]. Furthermore, Danny Haro stated that the surprising thing about the film's lack of success in Miami was that Edward James Olmos was "Mister Miami Vice". "They even made him honorary mayor of Miami" (personal communication, March 29,

2003). Warner Bros. felt that because they (Cubans in Miami) loved him and embraced him, this film was going to be the first to break the Miami market, because of Eddie's work in the community. "I know Eddie was surprised" (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003).

Ramon Menendez contends that the film's underdog perspective troubled Miami's Cuban Americans [59]. He says "I don't think Cubans see themselves as downtrodden or dispossessed … as annexed. I think has to do with their middle class experience. They want to stand in relief to other Latinos … they want to be special Latinos, crème de la crème Latinos"[59]. The regional and political differences, between Cubans, who tend to be politically conservative, and Mexicans, who tend to be a little more liberal, illustrates the difficulty of producing and promoting a "universal" Latino film that will resonate with these various groups [59]. However, Haro speculates that the Cuban-Americans did not react well to the subtitled Spanish prints that were being distributed initially. "They reacted to that -- how dare you talk down to us. We speak English" (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003).

Summary of Key Events of the Late 1980s:

Hollywood began to take the U.S. Latino niche market more seriously in the late 1980s. The rising importance of the Latino market became evident when trade publications like *Variety* began to track the growth of potential Latino moviegoers. This publication developed a Top 20 Hispanic Market Chart that included the current population of Latinos and projections of future growth. The chart indicated that Latinos generally lived in the largest cities like New York and Los Angeles and also suggested

that Latinos were regionally concentrated and their population was skyrocketing. More importantly, *Variety's* chart illustrated that U.S. Latinos were quickly becoming a viable audience for Hollywood studios.

The cultivation of U.S. Latino audiences also became a more viable venture for Hollywood as its biggest competitor, the Mexican film industry, continued to lose its appeal with these moviegoers. Hollywood studio films, especially Buenavista, the Spanish-language distributor of Disney, benefited from the lack of Mexican film production, as this distributor continued to successfully circulate its Spanish-language prints to Spanish-language exhibitors. Mexico's economic problems hindered the state-run film industry to the point where Spanish-language exhibitors had to depend on subtitled or dubbed Hollywood films in order to remain in business. While Hollywood circulated its Spanish-language prints to these theaters, this market continued to be considered secondary in nature. Studio distributors often circulated these prints several months after the initial English-language premiere. Hollywood began to pay more attention to this market after the surprising success of *An American Tail* and *Over the Top* in Spanish-language theaters, which illustrated to Hollywood the potential box office muscle of this market. The profit potential of these Spanish-language prints appeared to be extremely lucrative, particularly if a Spanish-language campaign was effectively implemented, since they were relatively inexpensive.

The growth of the U.S. Latino market motivated Hollywood to hire Latino marketing consultants on how to best increase the box-office figures from this audience. However, studio marketers confronted different philosophies from various Latino

marketing experts. On the one hand, The Spanish Connection contended that it was not financially viable to strike Spanish-language prints, because Latinos generally went to the English-language versions of the film. In contrast, The Arenas Group built its business by arguing that Spanish-language prints would boost a film's box office. This debate continued for the remainder of the decade, as marketers disagreed on the most effective type of print for this niche market. But, most of these U.S. Latino firms agreed that Hollywood was not spending enough money on its Spanish-language campaigns to fully exploit the box-office potential of this market.

The one exception to this rule was Columbia Pictures. The distributor received a great deal of support from its corporate owner Coca-Cola in order to successfully launched and promoted *La Bamba*. This advertising campaign highlighted the success of a young Latino rock-n-roll performer. The promotional plan also celebrated the virtues of being Latino through its music, language, lifestyle, and locale. More importantly, Columbia Pictures implemented by far the most aggressive Spanish-language advertising campaign in its pursuit to attract Latino moviegoers. The distributor's simultaneous release of Spanish-language prints illustrated that the U.S. Latino market was not an afterthought in this particular case and the film's box office figures benefited from a high Latino turnout. Concurrently, *La Bamba*'s mainstream strategy highlighted its love story and its rock-n-roll theme, which resonated with multiple audiences. Perhaps, more importantly, this marketing campaign proved that a U.S. Latino film did not need a highly commercial cast to become a box office hit. These films just needed to appeal to a broad audience.

The success of *La Bamba* began a trend of simultaneously releasing Spanish-language prints with English-language prints. Hollywood studios began to increase their Spanish-language media advertising campaigns. KMEX, a Los Angeles Spanish-language television station, reported that studios had doubled and even in some case tripled the number of media buys from the previous year [37]. All the major studios began to produce and air Spanish-language advertisements for their films [37]. Both Latino marketers and media executives predicted that a Spanish-language advertising campaign would become a vital element for most studio promotional plans [37].

In contrast to the success of *La Bamba, Stand and Deliver* failed to attract a broader audience of Latino and mainstream moviegoers. For example, the film did not resonate with Cuban moviegoers in Miami, because they did not respond to the subtitled prints circulated by Warner Bros. The distributor apparently did not do a great deal of research on this community and ask what type of prints they preferred to watch. Furthermore, the film's promotional campaign had a difficult time incorporating a grassroots campaign into its traditional marketing campaign. While on the surface, these two plans appear to complement one another, because this strategy incorporates both mass and one-on-one marketing. These two strategies actually clashed, as the studio marketers were not accustomed to the techniques used by the film's grassroots marketers like providing marketers with tickets for free screenings in order to create a "buzz." They were accustomed to marketing all their films in a similar manner regardless of content. These two marketing philosophies did not work well in this particular case.

Nevertheless, *La Bamba's* success also forced studio distributors to begin experimenting with the U.S. Latino market in order to develop a successful marketing template for these films. For instance, Spanish-speaking audiences did not embrace *The Milagro Beanfield War's* Spanish-language prints that were released after the initial general market campaign. *Milagro's* unsuccessful plan illustrated to Hollywood studios that they could not simply develop a Spanish-language advertising campaign and circulate Spanish-language prints to theaters and expect Latino audiences to embrace the film. These studio marketers needed to research the Latino market more closely. These distributors had figure out when it was appropriate to take on the added expense of generating Spanish-language prints.

Nevertheless, the late 1980s represented a great deal of promise for some U.S. Latino films. Motion pictures like *Stand and Deliver* took advantage of successful promotional campaigns implemented by Hollywood studios as well as the growing name recognition of Latino stars like Edward James Olmos. The studio distribution of U.S. Latino films represented a huge step in the right direction. This trend suggested that stories about and for U.S. Latinos were now considered as potentially lucrative products for mainstream entertainment conglomerates. These studio distributors or emerging mini-majors had the ability and the financial muscle to secure mainstream screens for U.S. Latino films and spread its stories and culture to new markets. The introduction of U.S. Latino films by Hollywood distributors led the mass media to call this phenomenon as the "Hispanic Hollywood" [7].

In contrast, if a Hollywood distributor did not acquire a U.S. Latino film in the late 1980s, this motion picture would encounter an extremely difficult marketplace. The distribution industry was littered with numerous independent distributors that went out of business. Many independent distributors overextended their limited resources by attempting to develop production divisions and this decision drove them to bankruptcy. The U.S. government also allowed the studios to vertically integrate once again, which essentially overturned the 1948 Paramount Consent Decree. The studio ownership of theaters made it increasingly difficult for an independent film like *Kiss of the Spider Woman* with an independent distributor to cross over from art film theaters to mainstream complexes, because major studios often reserved these screens. Independents were also hurt by slowdown in theater building, which allowed the studios to catch up with the demand of the exhibitors. Exhibitors no longer needed an art film or niche market film to fill a screen. Lastly, independent U.S. Latino films encountered a glutted marketplace of similar films that made it increasingly difficult to secure screens in highly competitive art markets. To exacerbate matters for independents, these distributors could no longer rely on the once lucrative ancillary markets like home video of the early 1980s. Home video stores were opting to fill their shelves with studio films by end of the decade.

While the marketplace of the late 1980s became increasingly unforgiving for smaller films, Latino filmmakers encountered a tax structure that no longer encouraged film investment. The tax breaks that were allowed to film investors in the early 1980s were no longer permitted by 1987, as the administration changed its tax policy. Investors could no longer write off limited partnerships in film production companies. Other

potential sources of public funds that were intended to assist minority filmmakers like the National Endowment of the Humanities and American Playhouse had their financial support reduced. The lack of revenue sources for independent filmmaking made raising money to produce a film outside the Hollywood system a troublesome proposition for even the most notable filmmaker.

This period concurrently symbolized a dearth of independent Latino films that were circulated widely in either mainstream or art house theaters. *Salsa* and *Romero* were the only non-Hollywood films to be circulated on over 25 screens. While *The Pentitent* and *Break of Dawn* had a difficult time locating screens and only received very limited distribution. As the studio distributors regaining control of the exhibition industry, the financial trouble of many independent distributors, lack of foundation support for filmmaking, escalating marketing costs, and an unkind economic environment towards investors were factors in discouraging independent filmmaking and film distribution. This marketplace hit the independent Latino film movement especially hard, because it was a relatively new type of motion picture. The Latino filmmaking community had not developed a successful slate of films that would encourage investors to continue funding these types of independent films. This community also had not developed a viable infrastructure to finance films outside of foundations or the studio system to develop and produce its films.

The mainstream publications declaration that the late 1980s was a "Hispanic Hollywood" overlooks the simple fact that *La Bamba* was the only U.S. Latino film of this period that was a box office hit. While Universal's *Born in East L.A.* and Warner

Bros.' *Stand and Deliver* both generated box offices that more than tripled their production costs, these films did not come close to the box-office figures of *La Bamba*. In contrast, Universal's *The Milagro Beanfield War* was a box-office disappointment. In addition, The Cannon Group, a mini-major, that attempted to promote *Salsa* failed to produce a large box office hit. The smaller distributors Cineworld's *The Pentient*, Platform Releasing's *Break of Dawn*, and Four Seasons' *Romero* did not have the advertising muscle to secure screens for their feature films. The inability to produce more U.S. Latino box-office hits was a troubling trend for both Hollywood and independent film marketers, because they had more advertising vehicles that targeted Latinos that included *Hablemos de Cine*, a Spanish-language television program about Hollywood films, and *Hispanic* magazine, a publication that targeted the often ignored English-speaking Latinos.

By the end of the decade, Columbia Pictures had produced a U.S. Latino box office success in *La Bamba*. In addition, *Stand and Deliver* was also a very profitable film for Warner Bros. However, none of the other late 1980s U.S. Latino films that were promoted by a Hollywood studio like – motion pictures like *Born in East L.A., Stand and Deliver*, or *The Milagro Beanfield War* -- matched the box office grosses of *La Bamba*. Furthermore, independent U.S. Latino films distributors like *The Pentient* and *Break of Dawn* failed to produce box office grosses that exceeded $50,000. The widening box office gap between a studio U.S. Latino film and an independent U.S. Latino film reflected what was also occurring in the general market, as many independent distributors struggled to survive.

While a couple of studios proved that they could distribute a profitable U.S. Latino film, the primary problem for most distributors of this period continued to be developing a U.S. Latino film with a successful advertising campaign that resonated with diverse Latino audiences. Studio marketers also had to figure out when it was appropriate to justify the added expense of producing and dispersing Spanish-language or subtitled prints. Even Spanish-language experts disagreed on when it was appropriate to simultaneously release these prints. Essentially, general market publications over exaggerated the significance of the "Hispanic Hollywood," because the era only produced one significant box office hit (*La Bamba*) , a couple of profitable films (*Stand and Deliver* & *Born in East L.A.*), and several box office disappointments. In reality, studio marketers of the late 1980s were going through a steep learning curve in finding a successful marketing template for U.S. Latino films that could be implemented in the 1990s.

Key Marketing Strategies (1986-1989)

Film Title	Date of Release	Distributor	Grassroots Marketing	Critics	Interviews	Media	Spanish Ad Campaign	Spanish/ Subtitled	Avoid Latino Label	Soundtrack/ Song	Box Office Gross	# of screens (premiere)/ (broadest)	Theatrical Run
La Bamba	Jul-87	Columbia Pictures	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	$54.2m	1250 screens/ 1250 screens	14 weeks
Born in East L.A.	Aug-87	Universal Pictures				X	X	X		X	$17.3m	1112 screens/ 1112 screens	5 weeks
Stand and Deliver	Mar-88	Warner Bros.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	$13.9m	30 screens/ 472 screens	12 weeks
The Milagro Beanfield War	Mar-88	Universal Pictures		X	X	X	X	X*			$13.8m	3 screens/ 437screens	15 weeks
Salsa	May-88	Cannon Group				X	X	X		X	$8.8m	1125 screens/ 1125 screens	8 weeks
The Pentient	May-88	Cineworld									N/A	1 or 2 screens*/ 1 or 2 screens*	1 week*
The Break of Dawn	Dec-88	Platform Releasing	X					X			N/A	5 screens*/ 5 screens	1 week*
Romero	Aug-89	Four Square	X					X			1.3m	24screens**/ 51 screens	13 weeks

Soundtrack/Song -- use a soundtrack/song to further promote a film.

X* = released its Spanish-language prints two weeks after it released its English-language prints.

X** = Variety only had its 3rd week screen figures.

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CHAPTER 5: A VIABLE NICHE MARKET? (1990-1995)

After a string of profitable U.S. Latino motion pictures like *Born in East L.A.*, *Stand and Deliver* and *La Bamba*, the number of these films in Hollywood studio pipelines became sporadic in the early 1990s. For instance, from 1990 through 1993, Hollywood studios circulated only two U.S. Latino films: Universal's *American Me* (1992) and Touchstone Pictures' *Bound by Honor* (1993). While Hollywood studios continued to circulate a few U.S. Latino films, their specialty divisions like New Line Cinema began to acquire and promote many of these motion pictures. These specialty divisions gave Hollywood studios the opportunity to target niche markets like Blacks and Latinos without spending a great deal of money on a high-budget Hollywood studio production. By the end of this period, Hollywood studios released a few more U.S. Latino films like Sony Pictures' *Desperado* (1995) and hybrid Latino films such as Twentieth Century Fox's *A Walk in the Clouds* (1995). But, the majority of the thirteen U.S. Latino films circulated in this era were by the art divisions of Hollywood studios or low-budget studio motion pictures that attempted to develop domestic niche markets.

In the early 1990s, the Latino market continued to look promising for film marketers, as the Latino population and the number of Spanish-language media outlets continued to swell. In addition, an increasing number of U.S. Latino films like *Mi Vida Loca* (1994) were launched at prestigious film festivals like Sundance. Simultaneously, hybrid "mini-majors" like Miramax and New Line Cinema that specifically target niche markets began to emerge as potentially ideal distributors for U.S. Latino films. For instance, several Latin American films such as *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992) produced

significant box office figures as art film distributors like Miramax began to acquire and aggressively released these films. Despite these promising trends, a number of factors in how studios marketed and distributed films like saturation runs made it an extremely difficult time for the majority of U.S. Latino films. In this chapter, after describing this challenging marketplace in which these U.S. Latino films were distributed in, I will briefly summarize how various distributors like Fine Line (*Hangin' With the Homeboys*), Warner Bros. (*The Mambo Kings*), and Sony Picture Classics (*Mi Vida Loca*) circulated and promoted U.S. Latino films. Lastly, my case studies examine how *American Me*, *I Like It Like That* (1994), and *My Family/Mi Familia* (1995) were distributed and marketed by their respective distributors.

Early 1990s Marketplace

Motion picture marketers were increasingly attracted to U.S. Latinos, after 1990 Census reported that this ethnic group had grown from about 15 million in 1980 to over 22 million in 1990. U.S. Latinos were also growing five times as fast as the general population and its purchasing power had grown to over $200 billion [1]. Furthermore, Hollywood studios were paying attention to U.S. Latinos, because they tended to go to the movies at a higher rate than the general population [2]. Despite the fact that Hollywood did not produce many U.S. Latino films, the Consumer Expenditure Survey concluded that English-speaking Latinos in particular enjoyed going to the movies [3]. In addition, Latinos, regardless of their language preference, tended to spend more money at theaters than the general audience [3]. By 1994, Latinos represented 13% of the box office gross or $676 million in receipts [3]. Perhaps more importantly, nearly 65% of

Latinos identified themselves as being brand conscious or brand loyal, which could be extremely lucrative for a studio marketer that successfully targets this niche market, since their films could develop a large number of loyal moviegoers [4].

In addition, studio distributors had an increasing number of Spanish-language media outlets that could be utilized in order to target both Spanish-speaking and bilingual Latino audiences [5]. The Latino market had simply become too large to continue to ignore for many mainstream media outlets. As a result, mainstream newspapers such as, the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Miami Herald*, developed Spanish-language newspaper editions that catered to this growing number of readers [5, 6]. The *Los Angeles Times* also purchased a 50% interest in *La Opinion*, the largest Spanish-language daily in the country [5, 6]. Spanish-language radio was also growing at a faster rate than the general market [4]. Mainstream advertisers spent over $200 million on this portion of the broadcasting industry [4]. This medium was an attractive vehicle to promote their goods and services to Latinos, because this ethnic group tended to be a heavy radio listening group [7]. Large broadcasters, such as CBS Radio, launched the CBS Hispanic Radio Network to target Spanish-speaking audiences with sports and entertainment programming [8]. The growing web of Spanish-language media meant that film marketers were more capable of reaching a larger number of Latinos, if they could afford the added expense of purchasing additional advertising time on these various broadcasting and print outlets.

Despite the fact that Spanish-language newspapers and radio stations were becoming extremely attractive advertising vehicles, Spanish-language television

remained the most popular advertising medium for mainstream marketers like movie studios. For example, Telemundo experienced phenomenal growth in terms of Hollywood studio advertising. Gary McBride, senior V.P. – marketing and sales of Telemundo, stated that movie advertising in 1988 was "close to zero" and by 1990 that figured reached $900,000 [9]. He estimated that movie advertising on the network would exceed a million dollars in 1991 [9]. The increase in studio advertising was attributed to the fact that studio marketers began to realize that many viewers of Spanish-language television were bilingual [9]. For example, a Telemundo study reported that 84% of the films attended by Latino moviegoers are in English [9]. Consequently, studios were no longer just promoting U.S. Latino films on Spanish-language networks. They were promoting a much broader range of films.

The U.S. Latino box office potential motivated Walt Disney Co. to alter its Spanish-speaking marketing campaign in the early 1990s. Disney marketers attempted to attract more Latino moviegoers to a broader range of films. Initially, Disney only targeted Latino audiences when there was an obvious connection to the culture [2]. However, after Disney hired Alan B. Dinwiddle as the vice president of special markets, the studio developed a new Latino advertising philosophy. The distributor also hired Uniworld Advertising to coordinate its ethnic marketing campaigns. Dinwiddle's goal was to make ethnic marketing a vital component for all its films with or without an obvious ethnic theme [2]. As a result, Disney marketers became more sensitive to the different dialects spoken within the Latino community. For example, Disney produced a

Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Cuban version of a Spanish-language radio spot for a film named *Run* in order to attract a larger Latino audience [2].

Film marketers could also more effectively target English-speaking Latinos, who did not listen to, watch, or read Spanish-language media, as U.S. television networks began to televise Latino-oriented programming. These Latinos were often an ignored segment of this niche market. However, network affiliates in large Latino markets attempted to televise programs like *House of Buggin'* that catered to these viewers. The most popular television program of this period was Fox's *Culture Clash*, a comedy series [10]. This Latino series was regionally televised in heavily populated Latino areas like Southern California, Texas, and Illinois [10]. The program was so popular within these markets that Fox considered televising the program nationwide [10]. The WB network also premiered *First Time Out*, a short-lived comedy that centered on Latina comedian Jackie Guerra. Cable networks like HBO produced English-language programming like *Loco Slam*, a comedy showcase, and *House of Buggin'*, a variety show that targeted a similar audience [10]. These television programs provided potential advertising vehicles for film marketers that were looking to reach English-language Latinos.

U.S. Latino films also began to receive a great deal of support from advocacy groups like the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), one of the most prominent Latino civil rights organizations, based in Washington D.C. The group produced a report titled *Out of the Picture* in 1994 that was extremely critical of the media for the consistent under representation and often-negative portrayal of Latinos. Simultaneously, the group began to promote the idea of producing more Latino programming across all media. This

civil rights organization later developed the *NCLR Bravo Awards* in 1995, which later became the American Media Latino Awards (ALMA Awards). FOX televised this awards program in December 1995. The purpose of these awards was to honor studios and television networks for their positive portrayal of Latinos. The television show also introduced and identified both popular and little known Latino films, television programs, and celebrities to more general American audiences. Lastly, the program provided an additional vehicle of free publicity for U.S. Latino films that often lacked significant promotional budgets.

Another leader in Latino media advocacy of this period was the National Hispanic Media Coalition, a Latino media watchdog organization, based in Los Angeles, California. In contrast to NCLR's approach, which honored networks for their positive representation of Latinos, NHMC led a boycott of ABC/Disney in 1994 and picketed its affiliates throughout the country [11]. This advocacy group contended that Robert Iger, the President of Capital Cities/ABC, had broken a promise to air a U.S. Latino television series by the fall of 1994 [11]. The growing focus among Latino advocacy groups towards U.S. media institutions and Hollywood signaled that Latino groups now wanted the studios to produce more authentic stories of Latinos and to include more Latino talent within their motion pictures. The backlash from Latino audiences towards *The Perez Family* (1995) and to a lesser extent *The House of Spirits* (1993) made it evident to the studios that these inaccurate films of Latinos would no longer be tolerated. Furthermore, these advocacy groups were becoming more active in mobilizing and discouraging Latino audiences from supporting these films at the box office.

A growing population, a more media savvy audience, and escalating purchasing power had not developed Latinos into a lucrative niche. Hollywood studios had been able to promote one box office hit, *La Bamba*. A huge problem for many independent or Hollywood marketers was that the most successful U.S. Latino film distributors of the early 1980s, such as Island Pictures, were no longer in the art film distribution business [12]. Consequently, similar to the early 1980s, these distributors did not possess a great deal of experience in promoting Spanish-language or U.S. Latino films to art film audiences or mainstream audiences. They were going to have to develop marketing campaigns from scratch, which is traditionally not one of Hollywood's strongest assets. Hollywood is adept at exploiting models. The film marketers of this time period did not have successful promotional templates to target Latino audiences who generally share a common language and a religion. However, the various accents, numerous dialects, geographic location, and the acculturation process of Latinos typically create more differences than similarities, which produced an evolving market profile (moving target) for studio marketers [1]. This diversity within the Latino community may have been one of the factors that made Hollywood leery of developing, producing, and distributing U.S. Latino projects throughout the majority of this period.

The plight of U.S. Latino filmmaking suffered a huge blow when American Playhouse shut down its operations in 1995. Throughout the early 1980s and into the early 1990s, Latino filmmakers received a boost from PBS' American Playhouse. It provided vital financial support to U.S. Latino films, such as *Roosters*, *…and the earth did not swallow him*, and *My Family/Mi Familia*. After American Playhouse lost its

monetary support from PBS in 1994, it attempted to become an independent producer and secured domestic and international distribution through a 15-film pact with Samuel Goldwyn Co. However, after Goldwyn's financial collapse in 1995, American Playhouse decided to stop its film production operation.

As important monetary outlets for Latino projects dried up and studios sporadically distributed niche market products, filmmakers that produced U.S. Latino films often had to rely on specialty or smaller independent companies as distribution outlets. However, these smaller distributors continued to encounter an uncertain future, because U.S. banks and Wall Street found investing in these companies to be far too risky, especially after the collapse of many independent film companies in the mid to late 1980s [13]. To exacerbate matters, many independent distributors did not have the necessary capital to self-distribute their films [14]. The lack of confidence in U.S. independent filmmaking even spread to foreign investors. For instance, Japanese banks did not invest in Largo Entertainment or Castle Rock, which were considered among the most successful independent companies [13].

U.S. and foreign financial institutions had good reason to become apprehensive of independent film investment, especially niche market product like Latino projects. The rising costs of film marketing had become an increasingly large barrier to overcome for even the most successful independent distributors, as competition for box office dollars and screens intensified. The escalating cost to promote a motion picture was problematic for small film distributors that often had limited advertising budgets and narrow audiences. Independent distributors were also hurt by the television networks' decision

to raise their advertising rates. Studio marketers with more resources continued to pay the escalating prices, because they asserted that spot television advertising was the most effective means of getting their films noticed by the public [15]. This prevailing philosophy resulted in the studios spending over $530 million dollars on all network and local television advertisements in 1990 to promote their big budget films, which signified an increase of 17% over 1989 [16]. This marketing approach to buying visibility further increased the divide between large studio films and small independent films.

Throughout the early 1990s, film marketing expenses for distributors continued to skyrocket, as costs rose from a little over $10 million in 1990 to over $15 million in 1995 per film. Tom Sherak, Fox's Marketing and Distribution head, defended this strategy by stating, "There are a lot of films out there, and you have to find a way to bust the clutter and get your own film to stand out" [17]. *Variety* described the dilemma that many studio marketers encountered regarding the escalating cost of film marketing, “No studio wants to risk box office failure by having its campaigns overshadowed by the competition, even if that means keeping a costly pace” [18]. The high marketing costs effectively shut independent distributors out of the two most lucrative windows – the holiday season and the summer [17, 19]. For instance, after the early success of New Line Cinema’s *My Family/Mi Familia*, this motion picture quickly lost its legs and visibility when it was overwhelmed by the promotional campaigns launched by the summer blockbuster films that premiered during Memorial Day weekend.

By the mid-1990s, traditionally slow movie-going periods like the fall window became extremely competitive [20]. This period began to feature a rising number of

summer films that could not secure screens or were not completed on time [21]. As a result, it was not unusual for four studio films a week to be slated for wide releases throughout the Fall of 1995 (September to Thanksgiving) [21]. The high number of big-budget film premieres along with competition from high-end art films and low-budget films ensured that small distributors would struggle to retain screens. In a short of period of time, the fall window resembled the summer and holiday seasons. The year-around competition for screens was also an ominous sign for smaller companies. These distributors could no longer debut a low-budget film during a slow period and hope that the film slowly builds an audience, because these films encountered new competition from several studio or high-end art films each week.

Niche market distributors of the mid-1990s frequently confronted an increasingly glutted marketplace where 12-15% of the nation's theater screens were tied up by a single big budget studio premiere [22]. Independents were competing for screens with studio distributors that spent about $16 million per film just on marketing alone [23]. As a result, lower budget films were having a difficult time securing screens. Universal Pictures president Tom Pollack describes the problems of distributing mid-budget or specialized films.

> What is happening is that movies that don't perform are out of the theaters faster. Middle-range pictures have shorter life spans and only the blockbusters can hold their own. Your really big pictures take on great significance because those films that used to break even or make a slight profit are now costing the studio money [22].

In other words, the escalating marketing costs made it more difficult for studios to recoup their costs for low or mid-budget films. The current marketplace placed the exhibitors in

position of power over the major studios by being able to dictate deals with Hollywood distributors that were trying desperately to retain screens in order to squeeze out box office grosses [22]. The buyer's markets of the early and mid-1990s placed smaller distributors at a greater disadvantage, because they could not afford to accept reduced box office splits from the exhibitors.

The development of the megaplex was supposed to alleviate this problem for smaller distributors of independent U.S. Latino films. A megaplex typically had 16 or more screens in one site [24]. Its numerous screens were expected to level the playing field for smaller distributors, as a more diverse group of moviegoers would now have a choice between a blockbuster film or an art film in the same venue. However, the opposite occurred: the increasing number of screens that skyrocketed from 23,800 in 1990 to 27,800 in 1995 facilitated the studio distributors' ability to reserve up to 3,000 screens for saturation runs. A studio distributor simply reserved several screens in a megaplex by staggering starting times. The number of films that were dispersed in at least 800 screens increased from 130 in 1994 to 153 in 1995 [23]. Bingham Ray, who ran October Releasing, described the problem that smaller distributors encountered: "All the malls and multiplexes should mean that distributors should be able to get more playdates, but it does not turn out that way. They'd rather add a second screen of *Lethal Weapon 3* (1992) or *Universal Soldier* (1992), and that's a year-round situation" [25]. Consequently, the development of the megaplex did little to benefit independent film distributors, because they continued to have a difficult time securing screens in a marketplace full of widely released films.

Furthermore, the saturation runs of studio films that became especially popular in the early 1990s put low-budget films at a great disadvantage. Hollywood implemented this marketing and distribution strategy because it provided studio distributors with three benefits. First, studios released their films to more screens to fully take advantage of the escalating costs of television advertising, because it spread the promotional costs over a large number of screens [26]. Next, marketers believed that saturation runs were an effective strategy to remain visible in a cluttered marketplace, even if it was for a short period of time [23]. Lastly, studio distributors received a greater portion of the box office from the exhibitors early in a film's run. On the other hand, there was potential risk with these quick and wide release patterns, supported by an intense advertising blitz, because they often left these studio films without an audience in the latter stages of their run. While this approach had some risks for studio films, independent distributors were left with few choices in terms of how to effectively compete with these multi-million dollar promotional campaigns.

Some of the most successful independent production companies of the early 1990s, such as Morgan Pictures and Castle Rock Entertainment, circumvented this problem by avoiding direct competition with studio distributors. Unlike Cannon and De Laurentis, which went out of business because they attempted to develop domestic distribution pipelines, the independent production companies of the early 1990s developed alliances with studio distributors in order to ensure access to mainstream theater chains [27, 28]. For example, Orion Pictures sold its distribution rights to Columbia Pictures in order to remain in business [29]. These production companies

supplied films to the Hollywood majors' distribution pipeline. In return, the distributors negotiated deals with the exhibitors and would also collect the revenue for these entities. These independent production companies enhanced deals with the majors by paying for the film's prints and advertising (P & A) expenses [30]. This type of agreement permitted these companies to lower a studios' standard 30% distribution fee. Furthermore, a lower fee allowed these independent production companies to reach a breakeven point sooner and return more money to their coffers. Studios also found these pacts to be profitable, since their distribution costs were fixed [31].

The successful independent distributors also followed the same formula of the prominent independent production companies. They avoided direct competition with major studios by developing niche markets [32]. For example, New Line Cinema was extremely successful with horror films (the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series) and black-themed films (*House Party* series) [33]. Miramax consistently developed savvy marketing campaigns for art films (*Pulp Fiction*) and foreign-language films (*Like Water for Chocolate*) that crossed over to broader audiences [33, 34]. On the other hand, Samuel Goldwyn acquired specialized films (*The Secret of Roan Inish*) and foreign films (*The Madness of King George*) with the potential to crossover to broader audiences [32]. Lastly, Fine Line tended to distribute lower budget English-language film (*My Private Idaho*) [32]. A vital component to the success of these companies was being extremely careful about marketing and acquisition expenses. They learned from the mistakes of their predecessors that went out of business. These companies avoided over-expanding their resources and relying too heavily on ancillary markets [32]. Instead, these

independent distributors focused on theatrical distribution [32]. They realized that they had to make a profit on their films' theatrical run, because the majority of their money would come from this revenue stream [32]. These companies understood that revenue from ancillary markets was often an uncertain proposition.

The successful exploitation of the niche-market distributors above brought the about development of studio art film divisions. The first two majors to enter the art film market were Sony Pictures and Universal Pictures in 1992. Sony developed Sony Picture Classics in order to increase alternative revenue sources through acquiring low-budget and foreign language films that had the potential to reach art film audiences [35]. The first movie Sony acquired was *Howard's End* (1992), a box office hit that earned more than $21 million [35]. On the other hand, Universal and PolyGram developed a joint venture to form Gramercy Pictures to produce and distribute low-budget films. While it attempted to successfully market and distribute these projects, Gramercy intended to build relationships with quality filmmakers in low risk ventures [35].

Shortly afterwards, Walt Disney Co. and Turner Broadcasting acquired the two most prominent independent distributors, Miramax and New Line Cinema. These two companies provided their corporate supporters with an invaluable template on how to effectively market Sundance hits and low-budget films. Simultaneously, the corporate funding of Miramax and New Line Cinema bifurcated the independent film marketplace [34]. Shortly after the acquisition of these two distributors, Miramax and New Line Cinema were circulating about one-third of all independent films in 1993 [36]. More

importantly, these companies combined to earn over $260 million and had a collective market share of 62% of all independent film grosses [36].

The corporate acquisitions of Miramax and New Line and the development of studio specialty divisions also broadened the definition of an independent film. Prior to Hollywood's encroachment into the independent film arena, an independent film typically was a low-budget production that was marketed and distributed outside the studio system by a small distributor. However, after the acquisition or the development of a specialty division, the trade magazines continued to refer to these motion pictures that were being promoted and circulated with studio support as an independent film. These art films were no longer independent films, but hybrid specialty films, which had the financial muscle to implement multi-million dollar marketing campaigns and the potential to crossover to mainstream theaters. This new type of film essentially developed a three-tiered film distribution marketplace. The upper tier belonged to the Hollywood studios that disperse mainstream product to most of the nation's exhibition chains. The next tier were the "mini-majors" with corporate assistance that circulate "star-driven" art films with the potential to crossover to mainstream audiences [37]. Lastly, smaller companies distributed lower-budget and obscure films with limited box office potential.

As the majors became savvier in effectively exploiting the art film market, the smaller independent distributors simply could not compete against studio-supported specialty divisions. This resulted in a marketplace where several minor distributors either went out of business or were on the brink of going out of the business [38]. The basic

problem was that small distributors could not afford to pay escalating acquisition costs, because it often equated to greater risks and lower profits [38]. Marc Mauceri, Vice President of First Run Features, describes the dilemma of small distributors after corporations either developed or acquired existing art film divisions.

> It changes the whole nature of acquiring low-budget independent films, foreign-language films and documentaries, when Sonys and the Miramaxs and the Fine Lines and the Goldwyns and the Grammercys are putting out hundreds of thousands of dollars – in some cases millions of dollars in advances [39].

The rising acquisition and marketing prices put more pressure on larger art film distributors to produce higher box office grosses for their films by securing theaters for a longer period of time. Consequently, the current marketplace did not allow for low-budget sleeper films like *Kiss of the Spider Woman* to be acquired and successfully distributed by smaller distribution outfits. These types of films were no longer profitable ventures, because small distributors had trouble securing enough theaters to generate a $10 - $20 million at the box office [38]. The independent films of the early 1990s rarely grossed more than a million dollars [33, p. 32].

Unlike the mid-1980s, where majors failed to effectively market, distribute, and develop secondary revenues for specialty films, the majors' began to develop some ancillary revenue streams that previously did not exist. These specialty divisions benefited from the cable industry's expansion of channels and need for more programming. For example, Bravo became the first cable channel to champion art films [33, p. 50]. It reached a potential audience of 22 million subscribers [33, p. 50]. After the success of the Bravo Channel, specialty divisions, such as Miramax, Sony Pictures

Classics, and Fine Line, cultivated relationships with the Independent Film Channel (IFC) [33, p. 50]. Launched in 1994, IFC quickly became a powerful force in the independent film market and became an important vehicle for independent films [33, p. 50]. Despite being an advocate for independent product, the channel is owned by Cablevision System and NBC and distributed by Bravo [33, p. 50]. IFC's popularly has continued to grow throughout the mid to late 1990s [33, p. 50].

The majors also began to gain control of the home video market by the early 1990s. In the mid to late 1980s, the major studios encountered a great deal of competition from independent video distributors like Vestron, which sold *Dirty Dancing* (1987) [40, p. 413]. However, by the early 1990s, Vestron's short run of success ended after a string of unprofitable films like *Earth Girls are Easy* (1988). Basically, this company could not effectively compete with the studios, because it did not produce their own motion pictures. In addition, video stores preferred studio product, because these products were supported by studio publicity and distribution, which often resulted in a great deal of revenue for these businesses through video rentals.

By the early 1990s, home video rental and sales had become an extremely important revenue stream for all the major studios. The most successful video rentals continued to be the theatrical films with the highest box office grosses. Consequently, as home video rentals and sales reached $20 billion, a majority of this income was going straight to studio coffers – as straight profit since theatrical box office receipts often recouped production and marketing costs [40, p. 419]. While rentals continued to a lucrative revenue stream for the large studios, Disney began a model for developing an

additional revenue stream -- home videos sales. This studio under Michael Eisner began to sell-through its animated titles in large volumes in 1987 with *Lady and the Tramp*, which generated $2 million in sales before the video was release. Disney followed that up by making its classics like *Bambi* (1942) and *Fantasia* (1940) available. By the early 1990s, Disney had produced a string of lucrative theatrical and sell-through home video hits like *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994), and *Pocahontas* (1995) [40, p. 384]. Unlike animated films, U.S. Latino films were not benefiting from the lucrative sell-through or rental market. For instance, *Desperado*, the top performing U.S. Latino video of this period, only generated a little more than $19 million in video revenue. Other fairly successfully U.S. Latino theatrical releases like *My Family/ Mi Familia* ($7 million) and *A Walk in the Clouds* ($18.6 million) also did not match their box office figures.

Furthermore, journalists often concentrated on blockbuster films instead of mid-budget or independent films, which put these motion pictures at a distinct disadvantage. Independent films often relied on the press for free "publicity" through movie reviews or features on the film's director or star. These stories are invaluable marketing tools for art films, because they often launch positive word-of-mouth campaigns. However, independent films in the early 1990s complained that it was becoming particularly difficult to get a feature story on an "indie" filmmaker in the *New York Times* or *Los Angeles Times* [25]. In addition, smaller distributors complained that it was almost impossible to lure critics to lower budget film screenings [35]. This problem was

exacerbated in the smaller markets where critics are so focused on high-budget studio films that they do not acknowledge most low-budget films [25].

The industrial factors above created several obstacles for foreign-language films to reach their target audiences. For instance, the foreign language market had never been worse. Distributors with subtitled films were having an increasingly difficult time securing screens in first-run theaters [33, p.32]. At one point in time, the inability to secure screens in English-language theaters may not have been a huge problem for some Spanish-language film distributors. They could have circumvented this predicament by simply securing screens with Spanish-language exhibitors, which were widespread throughout the Southwest. Though these theaters were often criticized for being in a "bad" part of town or being run down, they did provide Spanish-language distributors with a potentially large customer base. However, by the 1990s, distributors no longer had this option. This once large and lucrative exhibition chain had been reduced to a few screens and no longer had a strong presence in the U.S. During this period, foreign language films shrunk to only 2% of the entire U.S. box office [33, p.32]. Foreign-language film distributors cited that mainstream American audiences were not receptive to foreign-language films, because they did enjoy reading subtitles, bored by the slow pace of these films, and unhappy with the technical quality of non-Hollywood films [33, p.33].

The Mexican government attempted to address the problem above by hiring U.S. Latino filmmakers to produce motion pictures for its deteriorating film industry. However, instead of producing and circulating films, the Mexican government

established a foundation (Fundacion Chicanos Noventas) to encourage more co-productions between Mexican and Chicano filmmakers [41]. The foundation was a collaboration between numerous government and private organizations in Mexico and the Washington D.C.- based National Council of La Raza (NCLR) [41]. The pact among these different entities provided Chicano filmmakers with Mexican financial support, locations, studios, and inexpensive labor [41]. In the return, the filmmakers supplied the financially strapped Mexican film industry with a viable motion picture that could be profitably circulated to U.S. Latinos, a traditionally lucrative audience for its products [41].

Mexico's financial woes began in part when private producers stopped investing in the state-run Mexican film industry to begin their own individual enterprises. These private ventures were initiated when private producers became upset at Azteca Films for mishandling their product. Prior to these widespread grievances, private investors utilized Azteca, the state-run distributor, to circulate low-budget films to young immigrant Mexican males in the Southwest [42]. However, by the early 1990s, these private enterprises were also in economic trouble [42]. For example, Peliculas Nacionales, the principal private film distributor, went out of business in 1991 [42]. Mexican low-budget films lost their appeal both in Mexico and abroad [42]. The dwindling profits from these low quality films resulted in less monetary support for these motion pictures. The lack of funds from the Mexican private sector led to a steep decline in film production in a short period of time from 100 film titles in 1990 to 17 in 1992

[42]. The lack of Mexican films led to the ultimate demise of the once large Spanish-language exhibition circuit [43, p.215].

Ironically, soon after the private film sector started facing fiscal difficulty, the state-supported portion of the film industry had a mini renaissance. Mexico was not producing more films, but it was developing higher quality motion pictures. Much of the credit for the rebirth of Mexican films went to the Salinas Administration (1988-1994), which hired Ignacio Duran to direct the film industry. Under his leadership, the state of Mexican filmmaking improved a great deal [43, p.220]. The administration streamlined the film industry by shutting down the unprofitable state-run portions of the film industry, such as its production company (Conacine) and studios (Churubusco Studios) [44]. It provided the Mexican Film Institute with a great deal of financial support to improve the quality of its films [45]. The institute dispersed vital production funds to numerous first time filmmakers.

Like Water for Chocolate and *Cronos* signaled the reemergence of the Mexican film industry. These motion pictures represented a change in philosophy by both the Mexican government and filmmakers [45]. Prior to these two films, for many decades, many Mexican filmmakers produced cheap films that targeted only a domestic audience and recent immigrants to the United States [12]. These films typically did not garner a lot of respect among sophisticated moviegoers, but were profitable. However, these two films appeared to have a broader audience in mind than previous Mexican films. Perhaps, more importantly, particularly in the case of *Like Water for Chocolate*, these films benefited from savvy marketing and distribution plans.

Like Water for Chocolate revolves around a passionate, young woman, Tita (Lumi Cavazos), who is denied marrying her true love Pedro (Marco Leonardi). As the youngest daughter, she is dictated by family tradition to take care of her mother (Regina Torne) [46]. She consequently begins to channel her passion into her cuisine and puts spells over the people in the house [46]. Miramax acquired this film and aggressively marketed the picture to Latino audiences. Miramax's Spanish-language promotional plan encompassed national advertising on Telemundo, and Spanish radio and print [47]. Miramax also utilized the popularity of the novel to cross-promote the film with Doubleday Books [48, 49]. The synergy between the film and book created an interesting cross-promotional campaign that comprised of Mexicana Airlines, bookstores, restaurants, and the entertainment sections of the newspapers [35, 49]. Miramax circulated 180 Spanish-language prints with English subtitles, which represented a high figure for foreign-language films [47]. In addition, they distributed five Spanish-language only prints in heavily populated Latino states such as, New York, Florida, and Texas [47]. Miramax widely dispersed *Like Water for Chocolate* in cities like Los Angeles, New York, Dallas, Washington D.C., Boston, and Chicago [47].

Like Water for Chocolate represented the first significant Mexican box office hit in quite some time. The film was a success with both Spanish-speaking and art house audiences [45]. *Like Water for Chocolate* was the largest foreign-language box-office hit, until it was surpassed by *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). However, this film remains the most successful Spanish-language film in Hollywood history, grossing nearly $22 million at the box office. David Dinerstein, the marketing vice president,

estimates that 5% to 8% of the film's total gross came from Spanish-language theaters [48].

The other Mexican film that was distributed successfully in the United States in the early 1990s was *Cronos*. The film centers on the struggle for the possession of a "chronos device" – a device that gives its user the potential for eternal life and a thirst for human blood - between Jesus (Federico Luppi), a shop owner, and an aging industrialist (Claudio Brook), who sends his cruel nephew Angel (Ron Perlman) to get the device from Jesus at all costs [50]. October Films acquired *Cronos* and began to target Spanish-language and art-house audiences with Spanish-language advertisements [45]. The distributor planned to run these Spanish-language ads on English-language networks, but this strategy ran into a few problems. The Fox affiliate KTTV in Los Angeles would not run the distributor's Spanish-language advertisement, because this particular affiliate had a policy of only running English-only commercials [45, 51]. This rule surprised October Films co-founder Jeff Lipsky who said that, "We're floored by the whole thing" [51]. Oddly, another Fox affiliate KRRT-TV in San Antonio accepted their advertisements [51].

In its distribution strategy, October Films dubbed the English portion of the film into Spanish for some of its prints in order to appeal to more Spanish-speaking moviegoers [48]. The distributor debuted the film in two New York theaters [48]. Shortly afterwards, *Cronos* premiered in fourteen Los Angeles theaters [51]. October Films also planned to also release the film in Spanish-language markets such as, San Antonio. In the end, *Cronos* generated a box office of $621,392.

Outside of Mexico, a few other successful Spanish-language films emerged from Latin American and U.S. Latino filmmakers. Cuba, in a co-production with Mexico and Spain, developed *Strawberry and Chocolate*. Miramax acquired this film about a pair of young Cuban men David (Vladimir Cruz) and Diego (Jorge Perugorria), who initially appear to be extremely different both politically and sexually [52]. David is a conservative young man that passionately believes in Communism and the Cuban Revolution [53]. On the other hand, Diego is a homosexual with a great deal of love for the arts. After an awkward meeting at an outdoor café, they become great friends [53]. Despite Cuba's political relationship with the United States, *Strawberry and Chocolate* was a modest hit with U.S. audiences, grossing over $2 million.

Sony Picture Classics acquired *Belle Epoque*, a Spanish film about a young deserter of the Spanish Army named Fernando (Jorge Sanz). He befriends a Spanish painter named Manolo (Fernando Gomez), who offers him a place to live. Shortly afterwards, Fernando decides to go home. He is about to board a train to his hometown, when he sees Manolo's four beautiful daughters [54]. He purposely misses his train and makes his way back to Manolo's home [54]. Fernando manages to eventually seduce all four of the daughters. *Belle Epoque* had a U.S. successful run that was aided somewhat by winning an Oscar for Best Foreign-Language Film [12]. The film eventually earned nearly $6 million.

Robert Rodriguez produced *El Mariachi*, a low-budget, high-action film for $7,000, which involves a mariachi (Carlos Gallardo) who arrives at a small Mexican town carrying a guitar case [33, p.135]. Simultaneously, a hit man (Reinol Martinez)

looking to kill the local drug lord (Peter Marquardt), arrives at the same time town carrying a similar guitar case [55]. Their similar guitar cases will result in mistaken identity, which set off a series of explosive events. After the *El Mariachi's* success at Sundance, Columbia Pictures acquired the film and promoted *El Mariachi* around its low-budget nature, which may have hurt the film [56, p.370]. Moviegoers may have enjoyed reading about how Robert Rodriguez sold his body to science to raise production funds. However, audiences may not have been interested in watching a subtitled low-budget "home movie" in an era of high-budget, blockbuster films [56, p.370]. Greg Merritt (2000) asserts that Columbia Pictures may have been better served to advertise the film to Spanish-language audiences [56, p. 370]. Regardless, this micro-budget film ultimately earned over $2 million at the box office.

During this period, other Latino filmmakers took advantage of the Sundance Film Festival's orientation towards assisting and rewarding minority filmmakers. For instance, Joseph B. Vasquez won a screenwriting award for *Hangin' With the Homeboys* (1991) [57]. Other U.S. Latino projects, such as *Mi Vida Loca* and *My Family/Mi Familia* utilized the high visibility of the Sundance Film Festival to attract the attention of several prominent distributors. The festival's notoriety for inviting quality independent films enabled many of these filmmakers to secure distribution deals from a prominent distributor, which became extremely vital to the financial success of any independent film. The Sundance Film Festival also provided independent or niche market films with valuable reviews from film critics and trade publications that were often an important springboard for low-budget movies that often relied on word of mouth advertising. For

example, after lukewarm reviews at Cannes, the re-edited version of *Mi Vida Loca* was debuted at Sundance to much better reviews. The Sundance Film Festival's loyal support of Latino film projects has provided quite a boost to the Latino filmmaking community.

The success of Spanish-language films encouraged U.S. art film distributors that targeted both Spanish-speaking and art film audiences. In addition, the continued appearance of U.S. Latino films in film festivals like Sundance enthused domestic art film distributors. As a result, American distributors had more quality film product to acquire from U.S. Latinos and other Latin American countries that targeted both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking Latinos [12]. Furthermore, the population of this ethnic group continued to grow within the United States and throughout Latin America. The growing population of Latinos and an increasing number of high-quality U.S. Latino films led to more of these films being produced and circulated during the later portions of the early 1990s.

The Promotion of Early 1990s U.S. Latino Films

The subsequent U.S. Latino films encountered an increasingly competitive marketplace. While these motion pictures had a growing target audience, they often struggled to remain visible in a period when studios implemented saturation runs that gutted the marketplace. U.S. Latino film distributors attempted to alleviate the situation by implementing a variety of strategies in order to attract a large number of moviegoers. For example, Fine Line (*Hangin' With the Homeboys*) and Warner Bros. (*The Mambo Kings*) moved their films to less competitive windows. Other specialty film distributors such as, Samuel Goldwyn (*A Million to Juan*) and Kino International *(…...and the earth*

did not swallow him) launched their films during Cinco de Mayo weekend to take advantage of a Mexican holiday. Studio distributors like Sony Pictures (*Desperado*) and Twentieth Century Fox (*A Walk in the Clouds*) opted to launch these motion pictures in broad patterns of over 800 screens. Furthermore, most of these distributors circulated U.S. Latino films in non-lucrative windows such as late winter or springtime before the Memorial Day rush in order to compete more effectively for movie going audiences. Only Sony Picture Classics' *Mi Vida Loca*, Sony Pictures' *Desperado* and Twentieth Century Fox's *A Walk in the Cloud* debuted in the highly competitive summer window (Memorial Day and Labor Day) or the holiday window (Thanksgiving and New Year's Day). I will briefly describe ten U.S. Latino films that were promoted and distributed in this period.

Califilm/Concorde released *Kiss Me a Killer* (1991), a motion picture about a love triangle that takes place in a East Los Angeles bar between Jake Bozeman (Guy Boyd), a bar owner, his young wife/employee Teresa (Julie Carmen), and a musician named Tony (Robert Beltran) [58]. Tony and Teresa's torrid affair results in them plotting to kill Jake. The distributor did not have a marketable cast to promote. As a result, the motion picture was not widely released by Califilm/Concorde, which debuted *Kiss Me a Killer* on 40 screens in mid-April and generated a box office of about $100,000. The film never secured more than 46 screens throughout its run and did not match the box office totals of its opening week. *Kiss Me a Killer* had a theatrical run of eleven weeks and earned a box office of about $491,000.

Fine Line circulated *Hangin' With the Homeboys* (1991), a motion picture about two Blacks (Doug E. Doug & Mario Joyner) and two Puerto Rican men (Nestor Serrano & John Leguizamo) who spend a night out together in Manhattan. Along the way, they crash a party, are involved in a car accident, get caught by police for not paying for the subway fares, and chase young women [59]. The film did not cast any highly marketable actors. Its most commercial element was the talented director and writer Joseph B. Vasquez. This young writer and director recently received a screenwriting award at the Sundance Film Festival. Shortly afterwards, the distributor premiered *Hangin' With the Homeboys* in New York City in May [57]. However, the film was not promoted effectively. The motion picture was marketed as another *House Party* type film with rap music and humor [57]. Understandably, teen moviegoers, who expected rap and silly humor, were unhappy with the film's central theme of four young men spending a night out in New York City [60]. Furthermore, the number of Black-themed films, such as *Boyz N the Hood* and *Straight Out of Brooklyn*, which were being released simultaneously in the summer, hurt the film's visibility [61]. Consequently, during the first six weeks of its release in April and May, *Hangin' With the Homeboys* did not perform well and only grossed about $220,000 at the box office.

Fine Line thought the best way to combat this problem was by moving the national release from the highly competitive marketplace in August to a less crowd month October [61]. The distributor delayed the release, wanting to distance the film from the violence that was occurring at screenings of *Boyz N the Hood* [60]. The distributor did not want audiences to be scare to attend this particular film as well [57].

Fine Line was much more aggressive with the second release of the film in October, distributing over 125 prints of *Hangin' With the Homeboys*, earning over $200,000. This particular launch almost equaled its box office total from the first seven weeks. However, during the following week, Fine Line reduced the number of prints to about 60 and grossed a little over $56,000. The film eventually earned a cumulative box office of $532,933 over a nine-week period, a disappointment, since the film cost nearly $2 million to produce. The distributor was never able to develop an identity for this film in the midst of several Black-theme motion pictures that were being release simultaneously.

The Mambo Kings (1992) centers on two Cuban brothers, Cesar (Armand Assante) and Nestor (Antonio Banderas), who immigrate to New York City to hit it big in the music industry [62]. After immigrating, they encounter a variety of highlights and tragedies in their efforts to become stars [63]. The film's two most marketable elements were the soundtrack and the director. The soundtrack promised to be successful, because it featured the music of the legendary Tito Puente. The film's first-time director Arnie Glimcher was featured in *Newsweek,* who was described as a powerful art dealer who decided to direct a film. However, the film did not have any notable stars. Armand Assante co-starred in this film. He recently had co-starred in *Q & A* (1990) and *The Marrying Man* (1991). On the other hand, Antonio Banderas was a Spanish actor who was best known for being the star in Pedro Almodovar's films like *Atame*! (*Tie Me Up Tie Me Down*) (1990).

Mambo Kings moved out of its original Christmas release date to February, due to post-production delays [64]. *The Mambo Kings* debuted in the Miami Film Festival to a

sold-out theater [65]. Warner Bros. conducted a traditional platform release for the film, slowly releasing *The Mambo Kings* on about thirty screens on its two initial weeks that generated box office totals of $455,000 on its first week and $418,495 on its second week. On its third week, the distributor expanded the circulation of the film to 185 screens, which grossed over $1.7 million at the box office, which represented *The Mambo Kings*' most lucrative week. Although Warner Bros. expanded the number of prints to 235 on its fifth week and 257 on week six, the box office totals of this film never exceeded $1.7 million. *The Mambo Kings* ultimately earned a box office of approximately $6.7 million during its eleven-week theatrical run and was a disappointment, since the film cost about $14 million to produce.

Hollywood Pictures circulated a gang movie named *Bound by Honor* (1992) that traces the lives of three East Los Angeles friends, Miklo (Damian Chapa), Paco Aguilar (Benjamin Bratt), and Cruz Candelaria (Jesse Borrego) from teenagers to adulthood. Their life choices and institutional discrimination eventually pit two of these friends against each other. *Bound by Honor* was the first film released by Hollywood Pictures and Buena Vista Pictures [66]. They carefully conducted test runs in Rochester, NY, Tucson, AZ, and Las Vegas, NV [66]. Each of these cities encompasses different ethnic groups. Rochester is a predominantly Anglo market [67]. Tucson is a mostly Latino city [67]. Las Vegas has a more diverse population [67]. The distributor launched a television marketing campaign with about a half a dozen different advertisements that were to run at different times of the day [66]. The movie trailers and the publicity campaign focused on the violence that accompanies the three featured characters [67].

Outside of Jesse Borrego, who starred in the television series *Fame* (1984-1987), the distributor did not have a star to promote. Therefore, the studio's print marketing campaign highlighted director Taylor Hackford's previous films. The print advertisements said, "from the director of *An Officer and a Gentleman* and the producer of *La Bamba*" [67]. The film's one sheet utilizes the tagline from above and features a headshot of the three primary characters (Damian Chapa, Jesse Borrego, and Benjamin Bratt). In addition, the film's director Taylor Hackford, writer Jimmy Santiago Baca, and the film's stars made appearances to promote the film [66]. The film was released in two or three theaters in Rochester, Las Vegas, and Tucson [66]. This was the first time in the history of the studio that it had conducted a vigorous marketing campaign in a three small markets for a test run [67]. This was an unusual approach for a film marketer, because the motion picture does not receive widespread press coverage in test runs, which is vital in launching a film nationally. During these test runs, the film received mixed reviews. Most critics within these three cities believed the film was too long [66]. The length of the film and the lack of notable stars were the primary marketing obstacles for Hollywood Pictures [67]. Gangs also did not pose a major problem as once feared. One theater manager did call the police to break up a large crowd in Las Vegas [68]. Otherwise, exhibitors did not report any major problems.

After the three test runs, Hollywood Pictures changed the name of the film from *Blood In, Blood Out* to *Bound by Honor* [69]. The marketer switched its promotional strategy to highlight its family elements and de-emphasized the gang element [69]. The film had a fairly strong appeal in Latino markets, but it did not resonate with mainstream

audiences [69]. Furthermore, the distributor continued to be concerned about the gang theme, because violent incidents occurred at theaters for similar Latino films such as *Boulevard Nights* and *Walk Proud* [66]. This problem also occurred in theaters that screened the Black gang films *Boyz N the Hood* and *Juice* [66].

Hollywood Pictures encountered a huge social problem a few weeks later that would directly affect the release of *Bound by Honor*. The Rodney King verdict was announced in Los Angeles. A jury decided that Los Angeles police officers were not guilty of beating of beating Rodney King. The verdict set off the huge and financially disastrous Los Angeles riots. As a result, the distributor decided to postpone the release of *Bound by Honor* from late April to late May in Los Angeles [68]. Nevertheless, the distributor widely dispersed the film in several markets, such as New York, Miami, and San Francisco-Oakland [70].

Bound by Honor had a disappointing opening weekend, netting only a little over a $1 million on 390 screens. In its second week, the film's box office dipped to $672,407 on about 380 screens. The film's box office was hurt by not being released in the largest Latino market – Los Angeles. In its fourth week, the film finally debuted in Los Angeles on May 21. Hollywood Pictures opened in thirty Los Angeles theaters and also released five Spanish-language prints [69]. The film's Los Angeles debut helped to improve its box office from $413,900 to $651,800. However, Hollywood Pictures quickly reduced the number of prints over the next four weeks, as it only produced a box office of $700,000 over the entire month. The film earned a collective box office of $4.5 million over an eight-week period. *Bound by Honor* was a huge setback for Disney, because the

film cost $35 million to produce. Disney would not be involved another Latino-oriented film project until *Spy Kids* (2001).

Sony Pictures Classics released *Mi Vida Loca* (1994), a film that centers on the turbulent relationship between two young, Latina gang members Sad Girl (Angel Aviles) and Mousie (Seidy Lopez), whose friendship takes a turn for the worst when they develop a fierce rivalry over Ernesto (Jacob Vargas), who has fathered a child with each one of them [71]. Their relationship appears to be headed toward a deadly confrontation, but Ernesto is killed in a drug deal [71]. Afterwards, they attempt to renew their friendship. The distribution strategy was to circulate *Mi Vida Loca* in various release patterns depending on the region [72]. In some of these regions, the film was promoted as an art house film [72]. In markets with more potential appeal, such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Houston, the distributor was going to release the motion picture as a mainstream film [72]. However, the producers did not cast any recognizable stars. As a result, Sony Pictures Classics attempted to develop a marketing synergy with the film's soundtrack, which featured Los Lobos and Funk Doobiest [73]. The distributor conducted co-promotions with youth-oriented music stations that could potentially incorporate these songs on their rotations [73]. The distributor publicized both the soundtrack and the film in malls, local clubs, community centers, and boutiques [73]. Several of these songs were even featured on MTV [72].

HBO also became a vital contributor to this film's marketing campaign. Alison Anders originally directed *Mi Vida Loca* for HBO Pictures. As a result, HBO assisted Sony Pictures Classics by promoting the film to its viewers. HBO aired promotional

programs about *Mi Vida Loca* on HBO's Cinemax, which tends to have a young and heavy movie going audience [73]. In order to raise awareness in the Latino community, HBO programmed "featurettes" promoting the film around its Spanish shows on its network [72, 73]. Beyond using a cable channel to promote the film to Latinos, Sony Pictures Classics implemented a grassroots campaign in order to increase awareness within the Latino community [73]. In order to appeal to art film audiences, the distributor advertised *Mi Vida Loca* as a motion picture by Alison Anders, the critically acclaimed director of *Gas Food Lodging* (1992) [73].

Mi Vida Loca debuted in New York City in July [73]. Sony Pictures Classics selected theaters in a variety of neighborhoods in order to attract its target audiences – "hip youth," art house aficionados, and Latinos [73]. The film only earned $44,582 at the box office in its first week on 4 screens. However, in its second week, Sony Pictures Classics uncharacteristically dispersed 50 prints throughout the Los Angeles area [72]. *Mi Vida Loca* had an impressive box office of $514,413 or over $10,000 per print. Evidently, the second week success of *Mi Vida Loca* led Sony Pictures Classics to believe that this film could crossover to a larger audience. It kept on expanding the number of prints from 60 on its third week until it reached a high of 96 prints on its fifth week. Unfortunately, during these three weeks, the box office figures improved only slightly from $370,944 to $395,362. This broad expansion of prints was an unusually high number for this art film distributor. Sony Pictures Classics typically debuts a film in a few theaters in both Los Angeles and New York City and then slowly disperses prints

throughout the country [72]. The film grossed $3.3 million in its sixteen-week theatrical run.

Another Latino cast film of 1994 was *A Million to Juan*. The film focuses on Juan Lopez (Paul Rodriguez) a struggling immigrant. One day, his luck appears to change, as a stranger (Edward James Olmos) gives him a million dollars [74]. However, he must repay the stranger in 30 days. The film starred comedian Paul Rodriguez. Outside of Rodriguez and Olmos, the cast did not feature any commercial stars.

Samuel Goldwyn premiered *A Million to Juan* in the city of San Antonio on May 5th in order to take advantage of this festive day [75]. The distributor dispersed 181 prints on *A Million to Juan's* opening week and earned nearly $490,000. Goldwyn slightly dropped the number of prints to 175 on its second week and earned only a little over $300,000 at the box office. In its third week, this motion picture generated only $195,000 on 130 prints. Afterwards, Samuel Goldwyn quickly reduced the number of prints for remainder of its run. *A Million to Juan's* six-week theatrical run produced a cumulative box office of $1.22 million.

...and the earth did not swallow him (1995) was based on the 1971 semi-autobiographical novel "…y no se lo trago la tierra," by the late Tomas Rivera [76]. The motion picture follows the hard life of family of a 12-year-old boy Marcos Gonzalez (Jose Alcala), whose Texas family annually follows the harvest all the way to Minnesota. After airing nationally on PBS, Severo Perez, the film's director hoped to distribute the film commercially [76]. However, the film was hurt by the lack of a marketable cast. Nevertheless *...and the earth did not swallow him* was circulated in several U.S. and

international film festivals, such as San Antonio Cine Festival, Vina Del Mar (Chile) Festival, and the Cairo International Film Festival [77, p. 74-75]. The film won several awards at the San Jose Cinequest Festival, Santa Barbara International Film Festival, Minneapolis Film Festival, and San Antonio Cine Festival [77, p. 74-75]. The film eventually had a one-week run at the Beverly Cinema from May 5 to May 11, 1995. Afterwards, the exhibitor conducted noon screenings for the film throughout the month. Box office figures of this film are not available.

Roosters (1993) centers on a macho Latino male Gallo Morales (Edward James Olmos), who returns home to after a seven-year prison term for manslaughter [78]. At home, he encounters a disturbed daughter Angela (Sarah Lassez) and a bitter son Hector (Danny Nucci). Despite their various emotional troubles, Morales seems more interested in getting possession of Hector's prized rooster [79]. *Roosters* featured a strong Latino cast that included Edward James Olmos, Sonia Braga, and Maria Conchita Alonso. Olmos was a well-respected actor within the Latino community and he had just recently starred in *My Family/Mi Familia* and HBO's *The Burning Season* (1994). Sonia Braga also had name recognition and starred alongside Olmos in *The Burning Season*. In addition, she was featured in U.S. Latino films like *Kiss of the Spider Woman* and *The Milagro Beanfield War*. Alonso had appeared in several motion pictures like *The House of Spirits* and *Colors* (1988).

After a PBS airing, IRS Releasing did not widely distribute *Roosters* and debuted the film in only one West Los Angeles theater in July 1995, which is located far away from heavily populated Latino areas. The box office totals for the initial two weeks were

disappointing. It earned less than $3,000 for both of these weeks. The distributor broadened the film's release on its 6th week to nine screens, earning a box office of $67,000. In the following week, it grossed only a little over $36,000. These two weeks encompass most of the film's cumulative box office, as it only earned $148,919 over a seven-week run.

Desperado (1995), a more elaborate version of Robert Rodriguez's *El Mariachi*, debuted. The motion picture focuses on El Mariachi (Antonio Banderas), a wanderer who comes to town carrying a guitar case full of lethal weapons [80]. With the help of a local librarian Carolina (Salma Hayek), he comes to this little border town seeking revenge against a cruel drug lord Bucho (Joaquim de Almeida), who is responsible for the murder of his lover [80]. Unlike many of the U.S. Latino films of this period, *Desperado* had an actor with name recognition. This film featured Antonio Banderas, a Spanish actor, who was slowly becoming a recognizable star to mainstream audiences. He had significant roles in *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) and *Philadelphia* (1993). Besides being Robert Rodriguez's first Hollywood film, *Desperado* was his highly anticipated follow-up to *El Mariachi*, which he gained notoriety for writing, directing, and producing this feature film for a mere $7,000.

Sony Pictures debuted *Desperado* in mid-July on over 2000 screens, which represented the most widespread distribution of any U.S. Latino film in recent memory. The film grossed over $11 million at the box office on its initial week. On its second week, *Desperado* earned over $7.2 million on over 2000 prints. After grossing about $18.2 million in its first two weeks, the film's box office quickly plummeted. *Desperado*

had a collective box office of $25.6 million over its nine-week theatrical run. Sony Pictures most likely made a profit on the film, since *Desperado* only cost $7 million to produce.

A Walk in the Clouds (1995) is love story between Paul (Keanu Reeves), a young World War II veteran and Victoria (Aitana Sanchez-Gijon), a beautiful, but pregnant, graduate student. Initially, they pretend to be married to appease Victoria's old-fashioned father [81]. However, they eventually begin to fall in love. Keanu Reeves was casted as the romantic lead for this motion picture. He was a well-known actor to mainstream moviegoing audiences. He had just starred in the highly successful film *Speed* (1994). Although Anthony Quinn also casted in the film, he was no longer a huge box-office star. Therefore, the hiring of Reeves to star in *A Walk in the Clouds* increased the film's chances of crossing over to mainstream audiences. The only other marketable talent involved with the film was director Alfonso Arau. He directed the box-office hit *Like Water for Chocolate*, which was the highest grossing foreign-language film in American film history.

Twentieth Century Fox pushed back the release of *A Walk in the Clouds* from mid-April to early August [82]. It premiered on over 1300 screens and grossed over $14.4 million at the box office. This represented the most successful opening weekend ever for a hybrid U.S. Latino film. The distributor expanded the film's release to over 1700 screens for the next three weeks. However, *A Walk in The Clouds*' broaden release did not match the success of the initial week. The film earned over $11 million on its second week, over $7.5 million on its third week, and nearly $6.4 million on its fourth

week. *A Walk in the Clouds'* fifth week box office dipped to $3.2 million on nearly 1700 screens. After its sixth week, Twentieth Century Fox began to slowly pull the film from theaters. The film grossed over $50 million in fifteen-week theatrical run and most likely produced a small profit for the distributor, since the film only cost $21 million to produce.

Many of the independent or specialty U.S. Latino films of this era did not produce significant box offices. The small distributors of these films like Califilm/Concorde (*Kiss Me a Killer*), Kino (*…and the earth did not shallow him*), and IRS (*Roosters*) generally struggled in securing many screens. These distributors also did not have a highly marketable star that could distinguish their films from other Hollywood and high-end art films. Consequently, most of these films earned less than a $1 million at the box office. The one art film that probably could have performed better at the box office, but was mishandled by its distributor was Fine Line's *Hangin' With the Homeboys*. The film got labeled a "hip-hop" film with lots of humor and music instead of being a serious film that addresses the desires and hopes of two young Latino and Black men, a voice rarely heard in Hollywood. This marketing error led to a lack of word-of-mouth publicity for the film, because the wrong audience was attending the motion picture. Older moviegoers probably would have appreciated the film more and should have been the primary target audience of this distributor instead of young adults.

In terms of two U.S. Latino art films that were somewhat successful and produced a box-office higher than $1million were Sony Picture Classics' *Mi Vida Loca* and Samuel Goldwyn's *A Million to Juan*. Goldwyn debuted the film on Cinco de Mayo in San

Antonio, one of the most highly populated Mexican-American cities in order produce a strong opening weekend. However, the film did not have legs and quickly disappeared from theaters. In contrast, Sony Picture Classics utilized *Mi Vida Loca's* soundtrack in order to appeal to a young adult audience throughout its long theatrical run. In addition, the distributor received some valuable assistance from HBO to promote *Mi Vida Loca* to Latinos. The film did fairly good business among art film and Latino moviegoers.

The studio U.S. Latino films of this era also failed to exceed the theatrical box office generated by *La Bamba*. Warner Bros. *The Mambo Kings* attempted to utilize the film's Latin music theme, its soundtrack, and the director in order to attract Latino and mainstream moviegoers. However, a film revolving around Cuban musicians, a small percentage of the Latino ethnic group, was not a universal theme that attracted many Latinos or mainstream audiences, as the film earned less than $9 million at the box office. Disney's Hollywood Pictures did a great deal of research prior to releasing *Bound by Honor*. They pre-tested the film in three markets to see how it would resonate with mainstream and Latino audiences. In addition, the distributor released Spanish-language versions of this film. However, the motion picture was a Latino gang film. This theme typically is not popular among U.S. Latino moviegoers, not surprisingly the film did not produce a significant box office gross. The film was a huge box office disappointment for Disney.

In 1995, the two U.S. Latino films that were aggressively debuted were Sony Pictures (*Desperado*) and Twentieth Century Fox (*A Walk in the Clouds*). Both films debuted in the highly competitive summer window and ultimately may not have

maximized their box office potential, because these motion pictures encountered too much competition. For example, *Desperado* generated good box office grosses for a few weeks, but did not sustain any momentum. Though the film most likely earned a profit for the distributor, I contend that the film was mis-marketed by being identified as the follow-up to *El Mariachi*, a Spanish-language film. At the time, many foreign-language films that debuted in the U.S. did not succeed at the box office. This lack of success suggests that American moviegoers generally did not like to watch foreign-language films. This promotional campaign may have led audiences to believe that the film was simply another Spanish-language film.

On the other hand, Twentieth Century Fox (*A Walk in the Clouds*) attempted to take advantage of the Keanu Reeves' star power in order to attract a mainstream audience. While the film had a respectable box office of $50 million, I believe the film would have been better served if it had been released as originally planned in early April. But the distributor opted to release *A Walk in the Clouds* in the highly competitive summer window. Although the motion picture was described in a *Hispanic* magazine article as a Latino film that was about to debut in the summer, the magazine did not review *A Walk in the Clouds*, which could have been a valuable piece of free publicity. Lastly, neither of the studios apparently released any Spanish-language or subtitled prints, which could have boosted box office figures in a few theaters that were near heavily populated Latino areas.

Case Studies

The following case studies spotlight the promotional campaigns of three films: *American Me*, *I Like It Like That*, and *My Family/Mi Familia*. I selected these films because mainstream newspapers like *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Chicago Sun-Times* critically acclaimed all three of these motion pictures. In spite of this, each film was going to present a unique marketing challenge for the distributor. *American Me* was a powerful gang movie. Universal would to have to promote a motion picture about Latino gangs to this community. This ethnic group historically had never really embraced gang or pachuco films like *Walking Proud*, *Boulevard Nights*, and *Zoot Suit*. However, *American Me* featured Edward James Olmos, a prominent and widely respected figure within the Latino community. The film was also Olmos' directorial debut.

I Like It Like That presented a marketing challenge for Columbia Pictures, because it centers on relatively small Latino ethnic group (Puerto Ricans) and had no marketable stars. This left the distributor with three possible options on how to best market this film. First, they could center their marketing campaign around Darnell Martin, the film's director, since this was the first Black female film to be released by a Hollywood studio. This approach potentially appealed to both Blacks and females. On the other hand, Columbia Pictures could promote the film's Latino cast that included Rita Moreno, Lauren Velez, and Jon Seda, in order to target to Mexican-Americans in Southwest and Puerto Ricans on East Coast. Lastly, the distributor could attempt to

somehow label this film as an urban film, which could potentially appeal to both Blacks and Latinos.

My Family/Mi Familia symbolized New Line Cinema's first attempt to distribute a U.S. Latino film. This distributor previously had been successful in developing niche markets for Black-themed and horror films. However, a U.S. film distributor had been unable to successfully launch a film that centered on a Latino family. Previous films that centered on a Latino family often included motion pictures like *House of Spirits* that feature non-Latino actors in Latino roles. In this particular case, New Line's primary obstacle for marketing *My Family/Mi Familia* was that the motion picture featured a predominantly Latino cast that did not have crossover appeal, and a Latino director who had not produced a significant box office hit in over a decade.

American Me

American Me traces the life of a gang member named Santana (Edward James Olmos), whose life is filled with violence from conception to death. After Edward James Olmos earned an Academy Award nomination in *Stand and Deliver*, he made his directorial debut in *American Me*. During pre-production, *American Me* was already making the studio nervous. Danny Haro, who worked on the film with Olmos, stated that the studio was a little concerned about the violent nature of the film, especially after incidents took place around the *Bound by Honor* set, which began its production before we started this film (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003). Prior to the film's release, *American Me* received some negative publicity when Arturo Jimenez, a 19-year-old gang member, who had a small part in the motion picture was killed by a

sheriff deputy [83]. Furthermore, many Latinos were not happy with *American Me's* subject matter. They felt that films like *American Me* and *Bound by Honor* would further create damaging stereotypes of the Latino community [83].

Universal, the distributor of *American Me,* launched a five-week campaign to screen the film before thousands of community leaders in key Latino states like California, Arizona, and Texas, and in cities like Denver, Chicago, Washington, Boston and New York [84]. Consequently, Danny Haro traveled a great deal throughout the U.S. conducting these screenings and presentations to the community. He went to a city a week ahead of Edward James Olmos arrival in order to galvanize the community prior to the big premiere (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003). Without another recognizable star, Olmos, the star and director, had to shoulder a great deal of the promotional duties. He also organized these screenings to various community groups, Latino youths, law enforcement agencies, and religious groups in an attempt to explain the message of the film [85]. Olmos even had a screening for 500 people at the Galaxy Theater in Hollywood on his birthday and the day he received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame [84]. Mavis Cordero, a marketing consultant to the film, said, "Olmos wanted to show the film to youths so they will realize, we've got to do something about this" [85]. However, publicist Luis Reyes contended that while the film moved people, it was too harsh for general audiences. For example, a secretary passed out at one of the screenings (L. Reyes, personal communication, March 1, 2003). Despite the harsh nature of the film, Olmos received support from Nosotros, an organization dedicated to improving the representation of Latinos [86]. The Nosotros board asserted, "*American*

Me, may not present a very pretty picture of Latinos, but this is a story that needed to be told, honestly and by our people" [86].

Universal Pictures anticipated that *American Me* would attract rival gangs to the film. The studio consequently offered to pay for extra theater security in order to prevent potential violence [85]. The distributor also hired Josh Baran, an Edelman Public Relations crisis management expert, in order to improve the public's perception of the film [85]. Its marketing campaign avoided condoning violence. Its one-sheets and newspaper advertisements featured Olmos with an intense stare with gang members in the background [85]. The film's tag line was "In prison they are the law. On the streets they are the power" [85]. Television commercials and movie trailers focused on the epic nature of the film, while exhibitors described the motion picture as a "Mexican Godfather" [85]. Despite the fact that Universal Pictures ran both English and Spanish-language television advertising, Eddie Olmos was disappointed by the lack of advertising (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003). Haro contended that U.S. Latino films rarely received comparable advertising support when compared to an average studio film and *American Me* was no exception (personal communication, March 29, 2003).

Despite marketing precautions to avoid highlighting its violent theme, theater hostility did take place among rival gangs at *American Me* screenings throughout Southern California. This was a similar problem to other Black or Latino-gang related films such as *Boyz N the Hood* and *Boulevard Nights*. The press suggested that these incidents took place because these victims were attending the film. Furthermore, an

entire Southern California drive-in was cleared out when security guards thought they had seen flashes of gunfire [63]. Haro recalls a violent incident that took place outside a theater on Hollywood Boulevard (personal communication, March 29, 2003).

> They had a fight out on the street. They were beating up this guy (on Hollywood Boulevard). All of a sudden, they stop and he gets up. They walk into the theater together. I think we ran into that. Some of the houses did not want to run the film for fear of violence. I know that in New York City there was a story about shootings that were attributed to the film.

In spite of the negative press surrounding gang violence, *American Me* received excellent reviews from *Variety* and *Newsweek*. It also garnered good reviews from Gene Siskel of the *Chicago Tribune*, Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. *Hispanic* magazine provided additional publicity by printing an article on the motion picture. These reviews most likely enabled the film to do respectable business for a short period of time. Universal Pictures premiered *American Me* on about 830 screens in March, generating a first-week gross of over $4.6 million. On the following week, a slightly fewer number of prints only generated a box office of over $3.1 million. On its third week, Universal reduced the number of prints to a little over 530 prints and earned over $1.7 million. The film again generated over a $1 million in its fourth week on only 311 prints. After its fourth week, *American Me* quickly lost its legs and Universal Pictures reduced its release over the next three weeks. The film earned a little over $13 million over a seven-week period -- a box-office disappointment, since it cost $16 million to produce.

Danny Haro theorizes that *American Me* was not as successful as expected for several reasons. First, he believed the realistic nature of the violence backfired on the

film (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003). Perhaps more importantly, he believes that the Latino community had grown tired of the gang images (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003).

> I think they rebelled against it or reject it [film]. It was great for all the people who work in gangs. They loved it! They thought it was great. But from a marketing standpoint, we ran into that backlash and into trouble out there.

I Like It Like That

I Like It Like That is about Lisette (Lauren Velez), a half-Black half-Latina young woman from the Bronx, who struggles to raise her three children after her husband Chico (Jon Seda) is thrown in prison for looting during a blackout [87]. The motion picture did not feature a highly marketable cast. The most well known star was Rita Moreno, but she only had a supporting role. Lauren Velez and Jon Seda were not recognizable names. The director Darnell Martin was the only other marketable talent on the film, which represented her directorial debut. *I Like It Like That* was so well received at the Cannes Film Festival that Columbia Pictures dubbed her the "Cinderella" of the film festival.

Columbia Pictures and Sony Disco developed a co-promotion for the film's English-language and Spanish-language soundtrack [88]. *I Like It Like That* Vol. 1. was the English-language version. This soundtrack targeted young urban audiences and English-language Latinos. It featured music by primarily U.S. Latino artists, such as Cypress Hill, Lighter Shade of Brown, and the Barrio Boyzz [88]. The Spanish-language version was entitled *I Like It Like That*, Vol. 2. It was a salsa-rooted album with Jerry Rivera and Rey Ruiz [88]. These two soundtracks were scheduled to be released a month before the film's premiere [88]

Ivette Rodriguez, Director of West Coast Publicity and Promotions, who worked on Columbia Pictures campaign for the film, stated that the distributor was expecting Latinos to come out and support the film (I. Rodriguez, personal communication, February 4, 2003). Columbia Pictures hired Hispanic Entertainment Specialists (HES) to assist the studio on this project. She remembers that Columbia Pictures did buy some television advertising. Rodriguez describes Columbia's marketing campaign (personal communication, February 4, 2003).

> We did a tie-in with two Spanish-language radio stations. We did one with Latin publications. We did club promotions. We implemented a grassroots marketing campaign. We were out in all the different Latino communities. We were giving our postcards (and) sneak previews. We did some grassroots marketing on the busy streets in Huntington Park, Whittier, [and in] the different Latino communities.

Darnell Martin, the film's director, had several problems with Columbia Pictures' marketing strategy. First, Martin was unhappy with the film's trailer that says, "Every year there's a Cinderella story at Cannes, and this year it's an African-American woman from the Bronx"[89]. She did not want the studio to depict her as the "Cinderella" of the Cannes Film Festival [89]. Next, the director was troubled with the studio over the final cut and the film title [89, 90]. She wanted to call the film *Black Out*, but Columbia Picture insisted on *I Like It Like That* [90]. She felt the title was meaningless [90]. She speculated that they chose that title because it was close to Spike Lee's *She's Got to Have It* [90]. Lastly, Martin's problems with the studio's promotional campaign escalated, especially after the marketing head, Sid Ganis, began to market *I Like It Like That* as the first major studio release directed by a Black woman [91]. Martin did not agree with this

description. She stated, “To single me out takes away from all the new black women directors like Julie Dash, Leslie Harris, Euzhan Palcy” [87].

Prior to its debut, Columbia Pictures benefited from good reviews from numerous movie critics. For instance, *I Like It Like That* garnered an excellent review from Janet Maslin of *The New York Times*. *The New York Times* also ran a story on the film’s director Darnell Martin and described the motion picture. This story explained how Martin shopped her script titled *Blackout* to the studios, which eventually became *I Like It Like That* [92]. Furthermore, the story gave details of why she turned down New Line Cinema’s $2 million offer [92]. Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Variety* gave the film good reviews. *Newsweek* gave the film additional publicity by writing a story about the film. The article centered on this being the first film by a Black female director to be released by a major Hollywood studio. *Essence* wrote a short article on Martin. The motion picture was also reviewed by a wide variety of female-oriented magazines including *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, *Seventeen*, and *Vogue*. Overall, the motion picture received a great deal of publicity from a variety of different publications.

Columbia Pictures debuted *I Like It Like That* on 66 screens in October and generated a box office of $338,000. The distributor expanded the number of prints to following week to 111 prints and earned nearly $520,000. Its second week box office figure represented *I Like It Like That’s* most lucrative box office total. On its third week, Columbia Pictures broadened its release to 144 screens, but it only returned about $361,000 at the box office. The distributor slowly reduced the number of prints over the

next five weeks, while only generating a collective gross of about $562,000. *I Like It Like That* eventually earned a box office of $1.77 million over its eight-week theatrical run. The film was a box office disappointment considering that Columbia Pictures acquired the film for $5 million.

Ivette Rodriguez stated why Latinos, specifically Mexican-Americans, did not relate to the motion picture. Basically, the film portrays a very specific section of the Latino audience. She asserts, “the movie did okay with the art house crowd and it was critically acclaimed” (personal communication, February 4, 2003). Rodriguez suggests that East Coast Latinos did not want to see a movie about themselves that was so gloomy. On the other hand, Latinos in Los Angeles apparently did not relate to a Puerto Rican story.

Perhaps more importantly, *I Like It Like That* did not have any marketable Latino stars, other than Rita Moreno, to promote the film. The distributor did not really utilize Ms. Moreno to create awareness within the Latino community. The film also did not receive any coverage in *Hispanic* magazine. This publication could have provided additional visibility to a film that certainly would have been attracted viewers that may have been interested in a Puerto Rican film. However, the distributor opted to market the film's director Darnell Martin. She was not comfortable with the studio’s publicity campaign. She did not like her film being described as the first studio motion picture to circulate a film by a Black director or as the "Cinderella" of the Cannes Film Festival. Consequently, *I Like It Like That* was promoted as a studio film by a Black female director and lost its potential appeal to Latino audiences.

My Family/Mi Familia

My Family/Mi Familia follows the triumphs and tragedies of a Mexican family over a period of three generations. The film is told from Paco Sanchez's (Edward James Olmos) point of view, who is a writer [33]. The motion picture featured three marketable Latino actors Jimmy Smits, Edward James Olmos, and Esai Morales. At the time, Jimmy Smits also starred in ABC's *NYPD Blue* (1994 - 1998) where he played Detective Bobby Simone. Edward James Olmos had been a long-time celebrity with the Latino community. Esai Morales co-starred in the successful *La Bamba*. The writing team for *Mi Familia* Gregory Nava and Anna Thomas had earned an Academy Award nomination for *El Norte*.

Sundance provided a springboard for the film [33]. New Line Cinema acquired and distributed *My Family/Mi Familia*. Publicist Luis Reyes said, "New Line did extensive testing with the film" (personal communication, March 1, 2003). In the meantime, the filmmakers Gregory Nava and Anna Thomas were in discussions with New Line Cinema about an appropriate release date to debut the film. According to Anna Thomas, they did not agree with their initial release dates (personal communication, June 18, 2003).

> They wanted to release it on Easter Weekend or something. We were like, "you do not get the Hispanic culture at all." They are not going to the movies on Easter Weekend. You think of the holiday weekend as being a big movie-going weekend, but they are going to be in church or with their families. They are not going to the movies. So we had a lot of conversations like that with people, who were well intentioned and had great marketing sense, but they were approaching a whole different world and they really did not know a lot about it.

My Family/Mi Familia was marketed as an epic film. The distributor also utilized the name of producer Francis Ford Coppola to promote its film. While the film played well to all audiences, New Line's intent was to crack the Latino market, not necessarily Spanish-speaking Latinos, but second and third generation Mexicans American and people who identified with being part of an immigrant family (A. Thomas, personal communication, June, 18, 2003). It hired the Arenas Group and the National Latino Communication Center to assist in its marketing program [93]. Another key component to the marketing of *My Family/Mi Familia* was the use of its talent for premieres being conducted throughout the country. Jimmy Smits, Edward James Olmos, Esai Morales, Constance Marie, and Lupe Ontiveros were used for premieres being held throughout the country. According to Associate Producer, Nancy De Los Santos, the film's talent was a key component to the marketing campaign (personal communication, July 3, 2003).

> The important part of that marketing was that actors themselves came out to the community and said, "I am behind this film. I am supporting this film." Then the community comes out, because they are so thrilled that a Hollywood actor is coming to their neighborhood. That is where the connection is! That is why it was so important to have their support on that and that they gladly did it.

Furthermore, Nancy De Los Santos and Danny Haro, along with the support of New Line Cinema, developed grass-root marketing campaigns to reach Latino audiences. These grassroots marketing campaigns consisted of pre-screenings and attempting to get important community representatives on camera (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003). A key element to this grassroots marketing campaign was to gain the support of influential Latino organizations. They were able to garner the support of one of the most influential Latino civil rights organization, The National Council of La Raza

(NCLR), a Washington D.C.-based association, with hundreds of affiliates throughout the country. Although NCLR was not directly involved in the production, this organization realized the importance of the film (N. De Los Santos, personal communication, July 3, 2003). NCLR and Danny Haro's personal connections with the White House played a key role in organizing a brilliant Washington D.C. premiere that included a special screening for President Clinton. After the D.C. premiere, other NCLR affiliates throughout the country also did wonderful screenings (N. De Los Santos, personal communication, July 3, 2003). Other influential Latino community groups and organizations were utilized, such as Latino Pride, Mexican Heritage Corp. of San Jose, and Teatro Campesino, to spread the news about the film's release throughout the Latino community [93, 94]. The grassroots marketers continued to focus on organizing word-of-mouth screenings for *My Family/Mi Familia* in order to generate interest in the local Latino communities within the states of California and Texas [93].

Despite the fact that English-speaking segment of the Latino community was the core audience of this film, New Line Cinema implemented an aggressive Spanish-language campaign. The distributor spent more than a $1 million on Spanish-language advertising on this campaign in order to attract these viewers [93]. This figure represented the most money spent on Spanish-language advertising by any studio [93]. The distributor placed advertisements in many influential Spanish-language newspapers [93]. They also made Spanish-language television trailers (L. Reyes, personal communication, March 1, 2003). New Line Cinema also marketed the film on the Spanish-language networks Telemundo and Univision [93]. The distributor also placed

spot radio advertisements in every major city that the film was being released in [93]. In addition to placing Spanish-language advertising on Univision, the film marketers produced a television special called *The Making of My Family/Mi Familia* to be televised on the network (L. Reyes, personal communication, March 1, 2003). The half-hour special provided Univision with a free program and in return the distributor was able to promote *My Family/Mi Familia* to this sizeable audience (L. Reyes, personal communication, March 1, 2003).

In addition, *My Family/Mi Familia* benefited from an excellent review from Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times*. The film also received good reviews in mainstream newspapers and trade publications like *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Variety*. *Hispanic* magazine wrote an excellent article on the film. The *Los Angeles Times* printed two additional articles about *My Family/Mi Familia*. The director Gregory Nava wrote the first article, which describes the struggle to produce a film with authentic Latino actors, because the studios were hesitant to make a motion picture with a predominantly Latino cast [95]. In addition, Nava is critical of *The Perez Family* for its inauthentic casting of the film [95]. The second article compares *My Family/Mi Familia* with *The Perez Family* and highlighted the controversy surrounding realistic ethnic casting versus non-realistic ethnic casting that typically takes place in Hollywood films when an Anglo actor is cast as a Latino character [96]. *My Family/Mi Familia* was able to take advantage of the type of negative publicity being directed towards *The Perez Family*. Ironically, Samuel Goldwyn changed the release of *The Perez Family* from December to May, a week after the debut of *My Family/Mi Familia*, which essentially put

it in direct competition for the same audience [94]. This strategy backfired as the Latino community galvanized against the film. They were angry with the filmmakers of *The Perez Family* for its casting of non-Latinos actors in Latino roles. Luis Valdez described this film as, "a direct insult to all Latino actors" [94]. The community activists and actors encouraged Latinos to watch *My Family/Mi Familia*, while not supporting *The Perez Family* [94].

New Line Cinema released *My Family/Mi Familia* on Cinco de Mayo weekend to take advantage of the festive Mexican holiday. New Line Cinema felt that *My Family/Mi Familia's* immigrant theme would resonate with mainstream audiences [97]. The strong prospect of crossing over encouraged New Line Cinema to broaden the release of the film prior to the Memorial Day weekend [98]. Initially, the distributor was not going to expand the film until Memorial Day weekend [98]. This change in strategy was going to put *My Family/Mi Familia* into direct competition with the huge blockbuster films that were typically released around Memorial Day Weekend.

During the early portions of *My Family/Mi Familia's* theatrical run, New Line Cinema had successfully attracted Latino audiences, who immediately embraced the film. Chris Pula, the New Line marketing president, cites why he believes *My Family/Mi Familia's* marketing campaign was successful with Latino audiences [98].

> One of the reasons I think we prospered with this market is in the past movie companies have failed to recognize that the Latino consumer is not as homogeneous as many other consumer groups. There are really four main fractions making up the Latino consumer – Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Cuban-American, Southern and Central American [98].

New Line's strategy paid a great deal of attention to these four Latino segments

[98]. In addition, they screened this film to each major Latino group and attempted to discover what part of the film resonated with each of these moviegoers [98]. Similar to other successful Latino publicity strategies, this promotional campaign did not lump all Latinos into a homogeneous group [98].

New Line Cinema premiered *My Family/Mi Familia* on a Wednesday, May 3rd on over 400 screens and earned $544,710 in its first couple of days. Over the following two weeks, the film did extremely well. On its second week (its first full week), *My Family/Mi Familia* generated a box office of nearly $2.9 million on about 410 screens. The motion picture had the highest per-screen average of all the films released on this particular weekend and the sixth most popular film of the weekend [99, p.186, 100]. The subsequent week produced another substantial box office total of nearly $2.2 million on about 410 screens. These impressive figures were a result of New Line Cinema's efforts to release the film in heavily populated Latino areas [101]. "The initial response to *My Family/Mi Familia* shows that the Hispanic community is really hungry for good, honest pictures about their culture," noted New Line Distribution president Mitch Goldman [101]. By the fifth week of its run, New Line Cinema began to reduce the number of prints to about 300, but the film still earned over a $1 million at the box office. After this point, the distributor slowly began to reduce the number of prints, but New Line kept the film in theaters for an extremely long run of 21 weeks. *My Family/Mi Familia* was extremely popular in Latino markets, such as Los Angeles, San Antonio, and San Jose [94].

While it was a hit in Latino markets, Danny Haro contends that New Line Cinema did not spend enough money on advertising or give him enough time to effectively galvanize audiences in other general markets. For instances, in Boston, the distributor gave Haro only enough time to conduct two screenings for the film. The distributor only gave him limited promotional support. They bought some print ads and did not place any radio and television advertising (D. Haro, personal communication, March 29, 2003). Despite a limited release of no more than 420 screens, the film returned a fairly impressive $11.1 million. New Line Cinema undoubtedly earned a tidy profit, since the film cost $5 million to produce.

Furthermore, Danny Haro explains why New Line Cinema waited too long to implement a crossover campaign (personal communication, March 29, 2003).

> I was convinced that anyone would love this film. They never did marketing that way. All of a sudden, studio says we have a hit. They wanted to cross it over, but it was too late. It was already geared. When a film opens up, you cannot wait to do a crossover campaign. It does not work that way. The numbers were not strong enough in the Latino community to keep the film running long enough to allow the crossover to take effect.

In contrast, Santiago Pozo cited why he believed *My Family/Mi Familia* had a successful theatrical run. He stated, "*My Family/Mi Familia* was the first time that we convinced a studio to really have a full-fledged campaign, not only a little bit of publicity or little promotions or buying some media" (S. Pozo, personal communication, July 8, 2003). Pozo cited that the film was successfully promoted, because they were able to blend various promotional strategies like publicity and grassroots marketing. More importantly, Pozo received a great deal of support from Gregory Nava. Pozo stated that

it was the support of the filmmakers that gave him the creative freedom to implement an efficient and effective marketing campaign.

While the film was a box office success, Anna Thomas contends that the release date of *My Family/Mi Familia* really hurt the film's potential box office gross. She believed that the film could have been much more successful, if had been released at a different time (A. Thomas, personal communication, June 18, 2003).

> It made money for them. It made money for everyone who was involved, but it could have made a lot more. It was another audience pleasing movie, but they put it out sort of fast at a time then it bumped up against the big giant summer action pictures. It then dropped off against these giant action movies of the summer and lost a big part of the audience that it could have had I think; because it was equally attractive to the art house group, everyone else who wanted to have a good time group, and Latinos, who very strongly identified with it.

New Line Cinema's successful distribution of *My Family/Mi Familia* was a fairly standard marketing template that was implemented by many successful niche market films of this era. For instance, the motion picture premiered initially at the influential Sundance Film Festival, which had become an important venue for many independent U.S. Latino films of this era like *Hangin' With the Homeboys* and *Mi Vida Loca*. Next, the motion picture was able to take advantage of the growing influence of advocacy groups like the National Council of La Raza, which strongly supported the film. Lastly, *My Family/Mi Familia* benefited New Line's ability to successfully target and attract U.S. Latino audiences with a limited number of prints. New Line Cinema had emerged as a new hybrid distributor that was neither big studio distributor nor an independent. It was a distributor that had become extremely efficient at launching niche market films like

Black-themed motion pictures and had begun to attempt to develop this particular niche market – the U.S. Latino market.

Summary of Key Events of the Early 1990s

Between 1980 and 1990, the U.S. Latino population grew by over seven million people. In addition, to its skyrocketing growth, Latinos were a potentially lucrative niche market for film marketers, because they were brand loyal and tend to go to the movies more often than the general market. These qualities led marketers began investing more money into Spanish-language media like radio and television. For instance, Telemundo experienced a huge growth in advertising revenue from major Hollywood studios. Hollywood marketers were becoming savvier about how to promote their films to Latino audiences, because they began to comprehend that many viewers of Spanish-language television are bilingual and that Latinos enjoyed going to watch films in English. While most of the studios were spending more money on Spanish-language marketing, Disney became perhaps the most aggressive in its pursuit of Latino moviegoers. The studio hired Alan Dinwiddle, to manage its special markets division. Dinwiddle hired Uniworld Advertising to assist in developing tailor made Spanish-language marketing campaigns that appealed to the various Latino groups.

The huge growth in spending on Spanish-language television advertising was a reflection of what was occurring on mainstream television. Despite the fact that television-advertising rates soared from the late 1980s to early 1990s, many Hollywood marketers continued to purchase large amounts of television advertising, because they contended that was the most efficient and effective to reach a large audience and to

remain visible in a highly competitive marketplace. In addition, television advertising also became a vital tool to support a studio's saturation run of 3000 screens or more. Saturation runs were important for Hollywood studios, because these distributors kept a larger percentage of the opening week's box office. The studio's saturation runs were facilitated by the development of the megaplexes. These megaplexes that often had more than 16 screens initially were intended to introduce a wider array of films to the public. However, larger studios began to secure multiple screens at these theaters by staggering starting times. As a result, despite the fact that the exhibition industry grew by 4,000 screens, niche market and independent film distributors with limited or no television advertising budgets continued to have a difficult time securing screens, especially in the lucrative summer and Christmas windows.

In spite of a highly competitive market where blockbuster films occupied a large number of screens, some Mexican films, such as *Like Water for Chocolate*, were able to discover a niche within this cluttered environment. The box office success of this motion picture began a mini-renaissance for the Mexican film industry. *Like Water for Chocolate* resonated with both art film and Spanish-language audiences. The film generated a box office of over $21 million, making it the largest foreign-language hit in Hollywood history. The other successful Spanish-language film of this period was *Belle Epoque*, which earned about $6 million and also won the Oscar for Best Foreign-Language Film. The box-office success of both of these movies illustrated that there continued to be a large Spanish-speaking audience that was underserved by Hollywood and independent distributors and that would attend quality Spanish-language films.

After the phenomenal success of *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989), the Sundance Film Festival became the preeminent venue for U.S. independent films in the early 1990s. The festival also continued its tradition of being an important site for independent U.S. Latino films like *Hangin' With The Homeboys* and *Mi Vida Loca*. Sundance provided Latino filmmakers with a place where their films would receive reviews from movie critics. In addition, the film festival gave U.S. Latino films with an important forum where these motion pictures could be screened and potentially acquired by a Hollywood distributor. The festival also launched the career of the resourceful and talented Robert Rodriguez. The festival premiered his low-budget feature film *El Mariachi*. After an excellent reception by the Sundance audiences, Columbia Pictures acquired the film. Rodriquez would go on to direct *Desperado* in 1995. He eventually would helm several successful U.S. Latino films in both the late l990s and the early years of the 21st century.

Along with the rise of the Sundance Film Festival, the emergence of mini-majors like Miramax and New Line Cinema potentially provided U.S. Latino film projects with an excellent alternative distributor. These companies were superb options for U.S. Latino films, because they excelled at targeting niche markets like Black or art film audiences. These two distributors avoided direct competition with studios by cultivating niche markets. Consequently, these distributors were not hurt too much by the studio distributors' tendency to saturate the market with prints and to implement multi-million dollar marketing campaigns. For instance, Miramax formed excellent promotional campaigns for art films and foreign language films *Like Water for Chocolate* that resonated with multiple audiences. On the other hand, New Line Cinema did well with

horror films and Black-themed films and would attempt to expand their influence to the Mexican-American market with *My Family/Mi Familia*. These two distributors would continue to pursue the U.S. Latino market into the late 1990s.

The success of the two art film distributors attracted the attention of Disney and Turner Broadcasting, which acquired these two savvy marketing companies in 1993. The acquisition of these distributors provided their corporate supporters with a marketing template of how to promote niche market films and how to potentially develop new ones like the U.S. Latino market. In return, the large corporations provided these two distributors with the funds to broadly distribute a motion picture if they acquired a film that crossed over to general audiences. The corporate acquisition of these distributors bi-furcated the art film market into art film distributors with Hollywood backing and distributors that did not have a corporate supporter. By the conclusion of this period, the U.S. Latino art films that performed better at the box office were films released by these larger specialty film distributors.

Thirteen U.S. Latino and hybrid Latino films were released within this five-year period, which represented a huge growth in the number of these motion pictures. In the previous decade, only fifteen U.S. Latino and hybrid Latino films were distributed. One of the most obvious factors in distributing more U.S. Latino films was the box office potential of this ethnic group. For example, the U.S. Latino population grew by more than seven million people throughout the decade. Perhaps more importantly, a large percentage of this ethnic group was young and they go to movies at a higher rate than the mainstream population. Another factor in the increase of U.S. Latino films was that

niche marketing became a more viable business venture for Hollywood studios. Studio distributors were no longer producing films just for a mainstream audience. They also developed specialty divisions that specifically distributed films for niche audiences such as, Blacks and Latinos. These films like *My Family/Mi Familia* and *Mi Vida Loca* were dispersed by specialty divisions in either large urban areas or regionally released. These marketing strategies relied on positive word-of-mouth campaigns that generated fairly successful box office totals. However, studio and independent marketers had yet been able to produce a lucrative marketing template for its U.S. Latino films.

In spite of the growing number of films that were being produced by U.S. Latino filmmakers, they were often reliant outside financial sources like foundations in order to raise the necessary capital for film production. Consequently, Latino filmmaking lost an important financial supporter when American Playhouse, which provided vital monetary funds for U.S. Latino films like *Roosters*, *...and the earth did not swallow him*, and *My Family/Mi Familia* went out of business. This organization had also provided support for some of the most notable U.S. Latino films, such as *El Norte* and *Stand and Deliver* in the 1980s. In many respects, the loss of financial support from American Playhouse illustrated that Latino filmmakers were still too dependent on public funding to raise money for a Latino film project. Despite a growing population and increasing purchasing power, Latinos still lacked an infrastructure that would develop and produce U.S. Latino films.

Hollywood continued to experiment with U.S. Latino films on how to successfully release these motion pictures. Distribution strategies ranged from changing

release dates, releasing a large number of prints in saturation runs, slowly releasing the film to build word of mouth, to distributing the film on a Latino holiday in an attempt to discover a successful marketing plan for these motion pictures. The results of these numerous campaigns were mixed. Nevertheless, this period did represent some positive breakthroughs for the distribution of U.S. Latino films. For instance, *A Walk in the Clouds*' had a box office total of over $14 million during its opening week and represented the highest figure for a hybrid U.S. Latino film. The 2000 print release of *Desperado* signified the widest premiere of a U.S. Latino film. New Line Cinema's *My Family/Mi Familia* remained on *Variety's* 50 biggest hits for 21 weeks, which represented the longest run by a U.S. Latino film. These breakthroughs illustrated the growing importance of U.S. Latino films within studio and independent distribution slates.

Despite the modest success of the U.S. Latino films above, studio and independent distributors had failed to promote a box office hit within this era that exceeded the box office figures of *La Bamba*. Hollywood premiered several U.S. Latino films that were box office disappointments. *Bound by Honor's* was most likely the biggest setback, as Disney probably lost at least $30 million. The potential box office of the film was hurt by incidents of gang violence. In addition, the 1993 Los Angeles riots may have hurt its box office in its largest market. *Hangin' With the Homeboys* was mistaken as a "hip-hop" film and disappointed moviegoers who were expecting a funny or violent film. A previous PBS airing most likely limited the ability of both *Roosters*

and …*and the earth did not swallow him* to secure a larger distributor. Both of these films received very limited distribution.

In spite of the well-respected Mexican-American activist Edward James Olmos efforts in promoting *American Me* throughout the country and explaining the message of the film, the graphic violence did not resonate with most general audiences despite of good reviews from the press. Even though the film is extremely powerful and illustrates the dangers of becoming involved with gangs, many Latinos did not want to see another gloomy story about their community. Lastly, the threat of gang violence hurt the film's box office. The press reported several incidences of gang violence at *American Me* screenings. These stories certainly scared potential patrons, because they did not want to be victimized by gang violence.

Columbia Pictures' marketing of *I Like It Like That* had two potential problems. First, the motion picture was about a small Latino ethnic group that would potentially not resonate with the larger Mexican American audiences in the Southwest. Next, the film may have inadvertently been marketed as a Black film, because the studios promoted the motion picture as the first studio film to be released by a Black female filmmaker. Perhaps, this promotional campaign gave Latinos moviegoers the false impression that the film was a Black film. For example, at a time when many U.S. Latino projects were receiving coverage in *Hispanic* magazine, *I Like It Like That* was not mentioned in this publication. However, Martin was featured in *Essence*, a Black-oriented magazine. Furthermore, most of the free publicity that the film received centered on Darnell Martin being a Black filmmaker. The Latino talent like Rita Moreno did not appear to make

many public appearances and were not interviewed by publications. As a result, the Latino community did not embrace this motion picture about a Puerto Rican family. Despite excellent reviews, *I Like It Like That* did not perform well at the box office.

My Family/Mi Familia was the first attempt by New Line Cinema to develop the Mexican American niche market. This distributor was the first one to attempt to crack the English-speaking Latino market. It did a fairly good job at cultivating this audience, because the distributor received a great deal of support from advocacy groups like NCLR. New Line Cinema also implemented a $1 million Spanish-language marketing campaign, which was the largest campaign by any studio. However, the Mexican-American audience was not a significant percentage of the moviegoing population to sustain the film for more than a few weeks. Even though New Line Cinema most likely earned a small profit, the distributor could have earned a much larger profit had they not waited too long to implement a mainstream marketing campaign in general markets. For example, New Line did not provide Danny Haro much promotional support when he was in Boston. Unfortunately, the motion picture was also released at inopportune time. *My Family/Mi Familia*, after a few weeks of being in the theaters, began to compete directly with the huge summer blockbuster films that begin during Memorial Day Weekend. Consequently, the huge advertising campaigns of these studio films overwhelmed *My Family/Mi Familia's* ability to develop any "legs" and remain visible with mainstream audiences.

U.S. Latinos continued to respond more favorably to films either directed by Latinos and that featured Latino casts. On the other hand, this ethnic group did not

support films with non-Latino directors or non-Latino casts with the same level of enthusiasm. For example, Edward James Olmos' *American Me* generated a box office of nearly $13 million. A similar film, Taylor Hackford's *Bound by Honor*, only earned less than half of this amount. Another gang film directed by a non-Latina was Alison Anders' *Mi Vida Loca*. The film did receive some critical accolades. However, the Latino community critiqued the film for being a negative representation of Latinas. *Mi Vida Loca* only earned a little more than $3 million at the box office. Furthermore, the Latino community responded favorably to Gregory Nava's *My Family/Mi Familia*, which earned about $12 million at the box office. *My Family/Mi Familia* featured a predominantly Latino cast and it was one of the few films that celebrated Latino culture. On the other hand, Mira Nair's *The Perez Family* featured non-Latinos as Latinos. Again the Latino community disapproved of the film's inauthentic casting. The film earned only about a third of *My Family/Mi Familia's* box office gross. *The Perez Family's* box office was particularly disappointing, because it debuted in twice as many screens as *My Family/Mi Familia* [99, p. 187]. *The Perez Family* was not the first example of a recent Hollywood film that featured non-Latinos as Latinos and flopped. *The House of Spirits*, a film that featured Hollywood stars, Jeremy Irons, Glenn Close and Meryl Streep, as Chileans also encountered the same fate.

Another trend that became evident with Latino moviegoers was that they would not support films with a great deal of violence or that portrayed the Latino community negatively. For example, both *Bound By Honor* and *American Me* were extremely violent and did not positively . Both films were not successful. Despite the fact that the

well-respected Edward James Olmos directed *American Me*, Latino moviegoers did not support the film in large numbers. Another example was *I Like It Like That*, a motion picture about a Puerto Rican family in New York. While the film received an excellent review from *The New York Times*, it had a rather gloomy depiction of a Puerto Rican family and neighborhood. The film had disappointing box office figures. By the end of this period, Latino audiences were not only becoming more political, but to how their communities were portrayed in motion pictures.

The next tendency that was becoming apparent was that films about Puerto Ricans or Cubans like *Hangin' With The Homeboys*, *The Mambo Kings*, and *I Like It Like That* still failed to resonate with the much larger Mexican-American and mainstream audiences. The core audience for these films was not large enough to sustain these motion pictures in theaters for a long period of time or to produce a significant financial return. In order to produce significant profits, these motion pictures needed excellent reviews from the press, especially the Latino-oriented press like *Hispanic* magazine. Both *Hangin' With the Homeboys* and *I Like It Like That* did not receive any coverage in this particular magazine, because I believe these Puerto Rican stories were perceived to be Black films. Consequently, the distributor missed an opportunity to promote the film to an additional niche market that may have embraced the film. On the other hand, *The Mambo Kings* received a lackluster review from *Hispanic* magazine. The negative review most likely discouraged Latino readers from attending this film.

Many U.S. Latino films also failed to because a highly marketable Latino actor or actress had not emerged as a star from these various films. These films lacked a star that

could attract mainstream audiences. While Latino actors like Edward James Olmos and Jimmy Smits had name recognition within the Latino community, they did not possess the star power to attract mainstream audiences. Meanwhile, the highest grossing film of this period was *A Walk in the Clouds* that featured a non-Latino Keanu Reeves. This problem was exacerbated by the fact that many Latino actors and actresses did not get significant roles in mainstream Hollywood films except in U.S. Latino films. They are not given the opportunity to develop a fan base outside the Latino community.

The dearth of highly marketable stars also hurt U.S. Latino films in the potentially lucrative video market. While the revenue generated from the video industry far exceeded theatrical revenue for blockbuster and animated films, U.S. Latino films did not follow this trend. These motion pictures continued to earn most of their revenue from its theatrical run. For instance, even the most successful U.S. Latino films like *Walk in the Clouds* ($18.6 million), *Desperado* ($19.4 million), and *My Family/Mi Familia* ($7 million) did not match their theatrical revenue. Evidently, these films with predominately Latino casts were not attracting much attention from general market and Latino video renters or buyers.

The independent film market of the early 1990s had been altered by the corporate acquisition of Miramax and New Line Cinema. Both of these distributors were no longer independent, because they were affiliated with larger Hollywood studios. For all intents and purposes, the acquisition of Miramax and New Line Cinema developed a three-tiered motion picture industry that now included studio, studio affiliated specialty divisions, and independent films. The U.S. Latino films of this particular era reflected these three tiers:

studio film (*Desperado*), studio affiliated art film (*Mi Vida Loca* and *My Family/Mi Familia*), and independent film (*…and the earth did not swallow him*). Some U.S. Latino films like *My Family/Mi Familia* and *Mi Vida Loca* were directly impacted by these changes, as studio-affiliated distributors such as Sony Picture Classics and New Line Cinema attempted to develop niche markets and tried to target U.S. Latino audiences. The rise of studio affiliated specialty divisions hurt independent distributors of U.S. Latino films of this era. Independent distributors did not have the funds to acquire quality U.S. Latino product or the marketing budgets to effectively promote a film. As a result, the independent U.S. Latino films of this era that were not acquired by a large distributor did not produce box office grosses of even a $1 million. The lack of a successful independent U.S. Latino film reflected a growing economic disparity between specialty divisions with studio affiliation like Miramax and independent distributors.

While the marketplace of the mid-1990s radically changed the motion picture industry, large and small film marketers still had many unresolved questions about U.S. Latino films and Latino audiences. Marketers were still troubled that U.S. Latino films had yet to match the box office muscle of other niche market films like Black motion pictures. This was a troubling paradox for studio and independent marketers, because this ethnic group had a large number of young and frequent moviegoers. However, Latinos did not simply go to a Latino film with Latino talent, similar to Black audiences. As the late 1990s approached, film marketers were left with this troubling question about the Latino moviegoing audience. Was this ethnic group a viable niche market for studio and independent distributors?

Key Marketing Strategies (1990-1995)

Film Title	Date of Release	Distributor	Grassroots Marketing	Critics	Interviews	Media	Spanish Ad Campaign	Spanish/ Subtitled	Avoided Latino Label	Soundtrack/ Song	Moved Date	# of Screens (premiere)/ (broadest)	Box Office	Theatrical Run
Kiss Me a Killer	Apr-91	Califilm/ Concorde							X			40 screens/ 46 screens	$491,000	11 weeks
Hangin' With the Homeboys	Apr-91 & Oct-91	Fine Line				X			X		X*	2 screens/ 125 screens	$532,933	9 weeks
The Mambo Kings	Feb-92	Warner Bros.				X				X	X	30 screens/ 257 screens	$6.7m	11 weeks
American Me	Mar-92	Universal	X	X	X	X	X					830 screens/ 830 screens	$13m	7 weeks
Bound by Honor	Apr-93	Hollywood Pictures	X		X	X		X			X	390 screens/ 390 screens	$4.5m	8 weeks
A Million to Juan	May-94	Samuel Goldwyn				X						181 screens/ 181 screens	$1.22m	6 weeks
Mi Vida Loca	Jul-94	Sony Pictures Classics	X		X	X				X		4 screens/ 96 screens	$3.3m	16 weeks
I Like It Like That	Oct-94	Columbia Pictures	X	X	X	X			X	X		66 screens/ 144 screens	$1.77m	8 weeks
...and the earth did not swallow him	May-95	Kino International										1 screen/ 1 screen*	N/A	4 weeks**
My Family/ Mi Familia	May-95	New Line Cinema	X	X	X	X	X				X**	402 screens/ 415 screens	11.1m	21 weeks
Roosters	Jul-95	IRS Releasing										1 screen/ 9 screens	$148,919	7 weeks
Desperado	Jul-95	Sony Pictures				X						2027 screens/ 2027 screens	$25.6m	9 weeks
A Walk in the Clouds	Aug-95	Twentieth Century Fox				X					X	1300 screens/ 1755 screens	$50m	15 weeks

Moved -- changed their original released date.

X* -- released and then delayed it.

X** -- were talked into changing their release date by the filmmakers.

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CHAPTER 6: A SPECIALTY DISTRIBUTOR STAPLE (1996-2001)

The U.S. Latino films of the early 1990s like *My Family/Mi Familia* and *Desperado* failed to produce to a huge box office hit. Independent and studio marketers generally continued to have a difficult time in successfully promoting either a predominately Latino cast film or hybrid Latino cast film. The result of this trend was that Hollywood studios began to lose interest in releasing films with predominantly Latino casts that had crossover potential. By the late 1990s, Hollywood studios were no longer focusing primarily on domestic markets. These distributors were looking for films that would also perform well overseas in foreign territories, as international box office totals often exceeded North American receipts. As studios began to seek or produce films with global appeal, Hollywood distributors circulated only one U.S. Latino film, *Selena* (1997), as they began to gravitate towards hybrid U.S. Latino films like *Fools Rush In* (1997) or more mainstream films featuring Latinos in multi-ethnic cast films such as *Traffic* (2000). The lack of emphasis on the English-language portion of the U.S. Latino market resulted in the emergence of Latino distributors who strategy was to acquire and circulate motion pictures that would target U.S. Latino audiences. The growth of U.S. Latino distributors put them in direct competition with a growing number of specialty divisions from Hollywood studios like Fox Searchlight and independent distributors that were circulating various U.S. Latino films throughout the late 1990s into the early 21st century.

This period also saw the increasing importance of the English-language and Spanish-language Latino niche market as additional television, cable, and print outlets began to emerge and target these two different segments of this ethnic group. Despite having more potential advertising mediums, U.S. Latino films typically failed to generate significant box office grosses. Like most independent films, low-budget U.S. Latino films struggled to secure screens and remain visible against high-budget Hollywood promotional campaigns. This chapter provides a brief glimpse of the marketplace that affected the marketing and distribution of independent films, including U.S. Latino motion pictures, followed by an overview of the U.S. Latino and hybrid Latino films released in this period and a discussion of how these films were marketed and promoted by various distributors. This quick summary explains and illustrates that U.S. Latino motion pictures generally did not perform well -- with the rare exceptions like *Before Night Falls* (2000) -- which was marketed as an art film. The ensuing case studies provide a more detailed analysis of the different marketing strategies implemented by various distributors of several U.S. Latino films including *Selena*, *Price of Glory* (2000), *Luminarias* (2000), *Gabriela* (2001), and *Spy Kids* (2001).

Late 1990s-2001 Marketplace

The lack of a successful string of U.S. Latino films by the mid-1990s continued to be puzzling for film marketers, because Latinos made up the fastest-growing ethnic group among domestic audiences with ticket sales up 22% from 1996 to 1997 [1]. In addition, every year since 1995, this ethnic group had out-spent African-Americans at the box office [1]. By 2001, Latinos spent $1.5 billion in theater receipts or 15% of the nation's

total box office, and this ethnic group was expected grow from 33.1 in 2001 to over 43 million by 2010 [2, 3]. Perhaps, more importantly, mainstream marketers no longer defined the Latino market in terms of the 33 million Latinos living in the United States. With theater construction throughout Latin America, the potential audience for U.S. Latino film product grew to over a billion people. Consequently, film marketers obviously had a sizeable target audience for their motion pictures; but for some reason, Latino moviegoers were not attending these films in large numbers.

The lack of audience support for U.S. Latino films was also troublesome for marketers, because a larger number of Latinos were becoming acculturated and could speak English. For example, some Latino marketing professionals estimated that 60% of U.S. Latinos were acculturated [4]. This trend towards acculturation made English-speaking and bilingual Latinos attractive consumers for general market media by the late 1990s. For example, ABC made an effort to target English-language and bilingual Latino television viewers by producing *Common Law*, a short-lived comedy about a Latino attorney in 1996. Cable networks like ESPN and Nickelodeon began to produce more programming that targeted Latino audiences [5]. Showtime aired *Resurrection Blvd*. in 2000, about a Latino family. Si Television created bilingual programming with Univision-owned Galavision for a national test run [6]. By the end of the 1990s, many U.S. Latinos also began to realize the importance of the home computer. Home computer use among U.S. Latinos skyrocketed 68% over a two-year period in the late 1990s, which increased the possibility of Internet advertising that targeted Latinos [7]. General market advertisers were attracted to the escalating purchasing power of Latinos, that was

estimated to be anywhere from $550 to $630 million [8]. Niraj Gupta, a broadcasting, cable and interactive-television analyst for Salomon Smith Barney Inc., described advertising aimed at Latinos as "the fastest-growing segment of the overall advertising market" [5]. While U.S. Latinos were quickly becoming a hot market in other mediums, the film industry had not been able to attract this audience in large numbers to Latino stories or films with predominantly Latino casts.

Furthermore, film marketers apparently had not been able to take advantage of the escalating number of Spanish-language media outlets that could potentially promote these motion pictures. For instance, Spanish-language newspapers grew by 55% from 355 in 1990 to 550 in 2001 [9]. According to National Hispanic Media Directory, the number of Spanish-language magazines had nearly doubled from 177 to 352 [9]. The most successful of these Spanish-language magazines appeared to be *People En Espanol*. Not only had its circulation grown from 175,000 subscribers in 1996 to 300,000 by 2000, the magazine had nearly 700 advertising pages, an improvement of over 200 pages in two years [3]. As a result, in a five-year period, national and local print advertising within the Spanish-speaking market skyrocketed 207% from $82 million to $252 million [9]. Mainstream advertisers, such as Wal-Mart, began to produce Spanish-language radio advertising for the first time [10]. Cable channels that targeted Latinos now included Discovery Communications, women-oriented Gems TV, CBS TeleNoticias and Fox TV [6]. Even professional sports were getting into the mix, as nearly a third of Major League Baseball teams had marketing staffs dedicated to attracting more Latinos to the

ballparks [4]. By 1997, mainstream advertisers were spending over $1.4 billion in all Spanish-language media, which more than doubled 1990 advertiser spending [6].

In spite of various emerging promotional outlets, the two staples for films marketers, who targeted Spanish-speaking moviegoers, continued to be the television networks Univision and Telemundo. By 1997, general marketers were spending nearly $800 million on local, national, and network Spanish-language television advertising [6]. The growing population and purchasing power of Latinos led Univision to announce that the network was developing a new television network [11]. After purchasing 17 stations from USA Broadcasting, Univision executives expected this network to reach about 80% of the U.S. Latino households [11]. The network planned to target Latinos, who were heavy viewers of English-language television [11]. The second Spanish-language network, Telemundo, was purchased by Sony Entertainment and Tele-communications Inc.'s Liberty Media Corp. in 1997 for $539 million [6]. By the end of this period, Telemundo began to experience improved ratings from the mid-1990s with the success of *Betty La Fea*, a soap opera, and *Laura en America*, a talk show [11]. As a result, over 30% of Telemundo's advertisers in 2000 were new clients [5]. The network also appeared to target bilingual Latinos by televising Saturday and Sunday morning cartoons like *Jackie Chan Adventures* and *Men in Black* [11]. While advertising on Spanish-language networks appeared to be a logical choice for U.S. Latino films that were targeting these moviegoers, the box office figures of these motion pictures suggest that this audience was not responding to these television commercials.

Two primary reasons why Spanish-language audiences may not have responded to Spanish-language film advertisements was that marketers may not have invested enough time in producing culturally sensitive commercials and the sheer number of Spanish-language media outlets. The lack of cultural sensitivity often resulted in commercials called "copy cat ads" that were simply English-language advertising converted into Spanish and generally did not translate well [12]. The lack of cultural sensitivity also resulted in producing the same advertisement for all Spanish-speaking audiences, despite the fact that this segment of the population has different dialects and accents. Lastly, the growth of Spanish-language media made Latinos a more difficult audience to target. On the one hand, marketers could reach specific audiences within this niche market with print, magazine, or radio advertisements. However, the number of outlets forced studios to increase their Spanish-language promotional campaign budgets. In some ways, this expansion of Spanish-language newspapers, magazines, and radio outlets was a double-edged sword for marketers targeting Latinos. For instance, the number of Latino listeners or viewers for any particular program or advertisement may be smaller because the overall audience was being distributed over a larger number of media outlets, thus reducing the efficiency of Spanish-language campaigns. These marketing problems are likely to persist as long as the Latino viewing and listening habits continue to be under researched.

Hollywood's inability to produce effective promotional campaigns for U.S. Latino films led to a dearth of Latino film projects in the studio pipelines -- especially if it involved a predominantly Latino cast [1, 13]. The ineffective Latino promotional

campaigns reinforced Hollywood's perception that these audiences were too elusive. Hollywood studios could justify their lack of financial support for Latino stories by simply pointing out that Latinos had not proven to be loyal audiences to Latino stories. Simultaneously, for the few Latino films that made it into Hollywood's pipelines, the studios created a self-fulfilling prophecy for U.S. Latino films with its persistent inability to develop an effective two-pronged marketing campaign that resonated with both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking Latinos [14]. As Bel Hernandez, publisher of *Latin Heat*, so astutely pointed out that if studios do not make an effort to invest in publicity for both segments of the Latino market, they can produce quality Latino-themed films that simply will not translate into box office successes [13].

Many U.S. Latino films of the late 1990s encountered an uphill struggle before these motion pictures were released, because mainstream and art house exhibiters had not invested a great deal of money into building theaters in Latino neighborhoods, especially after Spanish-language theaters disappeared in the 1980s [15]. For example, the heavily Latino Broadway Market area of Los Angeles had only 6.5 screens per 100,000 people, which is far below the national average of 9.5 screens per 100,000 people [15]. As a result, U.S. Latino film distributors could not be certain that their films would attract Latino audiences, since a large number of Latino moviegoers had to commute to theaters outside their neighborhoods to watch a U.S. Latino film or a Spanish-language film. Moctesuma Esparaza, along with Victor Georgino and Pueblo Contracting Services Inc., proposed to build theaters in Latino neighborhoods that would begin to alleviate this problem [16]. This theater circuit, named Maya Cinemas, is scheduled to screen

predominately mainstream films and devote one or two screens to U.S. Latino films and Spanish-language films in the near future [16]. Maya Cinemas are being built in Salinas, Bakersfield, and Albuquerque. While this is a small step in the right direction, large downtown areas in Los Angeles with numerous Latino moviegoers still lacked theaters.

Another larger problem that U.S. Latino films confronted was a marketplace that was not conducive to independent or niche market films [17]. While the U.S. Latino population was quickly escalating and potential for future success appeared to be attainable for films that targeted this ethnic group, U.S. Latino motion pictures continued to encounter enormous barriers to success, such as securing a Hollywood distributor. Latino independent film producers who wanted to maximize their investments as well reach the highest number of moviegoers needed to secure a distribution deal with a large Hollywood studio. As a result, they needed to produce films that appealed to the six huge conglomerates that controlled the film industry: Disney (Walt Disney Company), Paramount (Viacom), Sony Pictures (Sony), Twentieth Century Fox (News Corporation), Universal Pictures (Vivendi), and Warner Bros. (Time Warner). These companies rarely were interested in U.S. Latino films that tended to only attract a single audience. For example, Warner Bros.' *Selena* in 1997 represented the last film with a predominantly Latino cast, which specifically targeted Latinos, to be distributed by a Hollywood studio. The corporate giants that ran the film studios wanted films with mass appeal. They wanted to develop and circulate films such as, *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*, *Men in Black*, and *Titanic* that all exceeded domestic grosses of over $300 million in 1997 and had the potential to generate billions of dollars in ancillary markets [18, p. 364]).

Although Hollywood studios and the larger specialty divisions typically avoided releasing films with predominately Latino casts, they did begin to include more Latinos in multiethnic casts in films such as *Lone Star* (1996), *Anaconda* (1997), *Traffic*, and *The Fast and the Furious* (2001) [1]. These mainstream films targeted both Latino and non-Latino audiences with stars from different racial and ethnic groups [19]. For instance, *Anaconda's* ensemble of characters included a Latina documentary filmmaker (Jennifer Lopez), a Black cameraman (Ice Cube), and an Anglo snake hunter (Jon Voight) [1]. Mitch Goldman, the president of marketing and distribution for New Line, bluntly states, "I predict there are going to be many, many more Latino actors working in the movies. Not because they're necessarily any more talented than others, but because they are Latino… It gets you more box office" [1].

While the six Hollywood studios continued to dominate the worldwide box offices by producing films with mass appeal, DreamWorks SKG emerged in the late 1990s as a potential competitor to the studios and another possible distributor for independent Latino producers. However, this studio with the combined talents of Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg, and David Geffen was apparently only interested in circulating and promoting films that would allow them to compete effectively with the larger Hollywood studios. DreamWorks SKG released its first feature film, *The Peacemaker*, starring George Clooney and Nicole Kidman in September 1997, which ultimately grossed a disappointing $40 million [18, p. 397]. By the end of this era, this distributor had bounced back to distribute five high-budget films including *Cast Away*, *Gladiator*, and *Meet the Parents* that each produced box office grosses exceeding over

$100 million in 2000. Consequently, the emergence of DreamWorks SKG has not provided producers of Latino projects with another viable option, since this distributor had not acquired and promoted a Latino film.

While DreamWorks had not provided a viable option for many Latino producers, the studios were beginning to acquire or develop specialty film divisions that were looking for art films or niche market films. Hollywood studios were seeking to emulate the success of Disney's Miramax, which dominated the 1996 Academy Awards with *The English Patient* and *Sling Blade*. In 1997, Universal Pictures acquired October Films, which was best known for circulating *Secrets and Lies* (1996) and *Breaking the Waves* (1996) [18, p. 394]. During the following year, Paramount developed Paramount Classics to circulate independent films [18]. At the conclusion of the 1990s, all the major studios had independent film divisions that specialized in low-budget films designed to target a different audience than their mainstream slate of films. These specialty distributors like Fox Searchlight provided viable alternatives for Latino film projects such as *Star Maps* (1997) and *Woman on Top* (2000).

The competitive nature of the motion picture industry forced more studio films and specialty distributors to avoid the traditional platform release styles of the past, because the congested market made it nearly impossible for most independent or art films like *Girlfight* (2001) to slowly develop an audience [20]. In the traditional platform style of releasing a film, most distributors try to build a word of mouth with target audiences by slowly expanding the number screens a film secures until the movie reaches its widest pattern by around the sixth week. However, the development of megaplexes throughout

the country allowed studios distributors to screen blockbusters on three or four screens, because these huge theaters were in constant need of film product to fill their screens. In order to meet this great demand, studios routinely premiered their films on more than 3,000 screens [21]. Douglas Gomery (2000) describes why films in the 1990s needed wider premieres [18, p. 377].

> Theatrical release of the 1990s required more theater screens so Hollywood could take full advantage of economies of scale from television advertising to fashion a hit that would pay for itself through pay TV and home video. Because the cost of marketing a feature film can often exceed $30 million, if it is spread over more theaters, marketing costs per theater can remain relatively low.

Nevertheless, these wide release patterns of studio films could also be a doubled-edged sword, because they sacrificed longevity and word-of-mouth potential for wider releases and collecting a higher percentage of the film rental in the early stages of a film's run.

Despite the increase in the number of screens in the U.S. from 29,700 screens in 1996 to 36,700 in 2001, independent motion pictures like the majority of U.S. Latino films continued to have a tough time gaining visibility within a congested marketplace that often featured several new Hollywood films each week. Most small distributors in this era simply did not have the marketing budgets to compete with either mainstream studio distributors, which spent on average over $27 million per film on marketing in 2001, or with art film distributors, which spent over $8 million per film on advertising. For example, Sony Classics co-president Tom Bernard cites the advertising rates of *The New York Times* by stating, "It has quadzillioned its ad rate in the last 15 years. A specialty film has to advertise in the Times, and many distributors just can't afford it"

[22]. Furthermore, Bernard explains, "advertising is getting expensive and the places have dwindled dramatically – a lot of screens, but fewer that take specialty films" [22]. Consequently, it is not surprising that "arthouse fare" or niche market films showed up on 39 percent fewer screens in 1996 than in the previous year [22].

Art film or smaller distributors also had an increasingly difficult time securing screens within the marketplace. The limited supply of art film houses could not accommodate the skyrocketing number art film debuts, which more than doubled from 165 films in 1990 to 338 in 2000 [23, 24]. The lack of specialty film theaters did not provide independent distributors enough time to slowly develop an audience for a film with a long word-of-mouth advertising campaign [25]. Unlike studios that support their films with expensive media advertising campaigns that could quickly generate a significant box office return, art films needed to develop their audiences slowly through word-of-mouth campaigns that often extend a film's run to several months [26]. As a result, by the late 1990s, art films had an increasingly difficult time breaking $1 million at the box office in a limited release of under 1,000 screens [27]. This was a relatively new trend in art film distribution. As late as the early 1990s, several art films like *Like Water for Chocolate* produced grosses of over $20 million on a limited release of about 500 prints [28].

The lack of screens that U.S. Latino films could secure was also hurt by the inability of Robert Redford's Sundance Cinema to build more art theaters. Things looked promising for Sundance Cinemas, as the exhibitor developed a partnership with General Cinemas in 1997 to build more art house theaters throughout the country. The

exhibition chain originally targeted markets like, Chicago, Boston, and other cities located in Northeast and East, as well as regional areas such as Texas and Florida [29]. However, this joint venture never produced a single theater, because General Cinemas filed for bankruptcy reorganization in 2000 [29]. This ended Sundance Cinema's efforts to build more art theaters, since General Cinemas was going to pay for most of the construction costs [29]. Consequently, independent and art films would continue to face problems securing screens throughout the country.

On the other hand, the Sundance Institute and the Sundance Film Festival continued to be vital springboards for developing and premiering both U.S. Latino and Latin American film projects. The institute's Latin American program helped to develop Brazil's *Central Station* [30]. The film also won Sundance's Cinema 100 script award in 1996 [31]. Miguel Arteta's *Star Maps* secured a distributor after an excellent reception at Sundance [32]. Mexico's *Santitos* won the 1999 Sundance Jury Award. *Girlfight* won an award at the 2000 Sundance Film Festival. Perhaps more importantly, Sundance introduced U.S. Latino films and Latin American films to both U.S. distributors and audiences. Sundance also provided some much-needed ancillary revenue for some independent films. For instance, Sundance's cable network, The Sundance Channel, a pay-cable network that began its service in 1996, benefited many independent films. Lastly, some of the successful independent films at the Sundance Film Festival began to secure shelf space at Blockbusters throughout the country, as the video chain became a strong supporters of the film festival [24].

Despite Sundance's efforts to develop more U.S. Latino and Latin American films and to produce some ancillary revenues for art films, many smaller art film distributors that were releasing U.S. Latino films continued to have difficulties generating revenue in the potentially lucrative home video and DVD market. For instance, *Star Maps*, a hit at Sundance, generated only about $1.5 million in video sales. Even Miramax had a hard time selling off some of its lesser-known film titles to smaller video stores [33]. Miramax and other distributors developed a concept called revenue sharing to alleviate this problem [33]. In this scenario, the distributor would give the video storeowner a "free" copy. In return, the owner would split the revenue generated by the video with the distributor [33]. However, smaller distributors did not have the financial resources to make copies for all the video stores [33]. On the other hand, studio distributors with deeper pockets were able to take advantage of this strategy and work with smaller video stores. This enabled the studio distributors to once again regain control of the market and effectively shut out smaller video distributors [33]. The lack of access to shelf space had a direct impact on many U.S. Latino films of the late 1990s, because these films were often acquired and distributed by smaller distributors.

By the late 1990s, the major studios were able to also develop an additional revenue source from the home video market – the sell through video. The studios were able to take advantage of two factors. First, VCR penetration by this period reached about 90% [18, p. 411]. Consequently, most Americans had the ability to begin developing their household libraries. Next, the major studios were able to reap the rewards of a changing consumer trend. As more stores like Wal-Mart and Internet sites

like reel.com began to sell videos, sales skyrocketed. By 1996, videos selling generated $10.4 billion, which nearly matched video rental figures of $11.5 billion [18, p. 418]. The major studios with the majority of the blockbuster hits and animated films continued to be the most popular sellers. Disney held a huge advantage over other studios in the sell-through market [18, p. 416]. For instance, of the top 10 selling videos of the 1997, six of the films belonged to Disney [18, p. 416]. Disney's ability to effectively promote their children titles benefited motion pictures that were being distributed by its subsidiaries like Dimension's *Spy Kids*. This Disney-affiliated, U.S. Latino motion picture that included a Spanish-language version generated over $150 million in video and DVD sales [34].

Since many independent marketers of U.S. Latino films encountered huge barriers to success in the ancillary markets, some distributors of U.S. Latino films began to rely on organizations like Premiere Weekend Club to increase their theatrical receipts. This company developed a plan in order to improve the box office figures of U.S. Latino film product, especially during its opening week, and to motivate studios to develop more of these motion pictures. The Premiere Weekend Club asserted that it had the ability to galvanize its members to attend a Latino motion picture during its vital opening week. The organization would notify its subscribers through the Internet that a film with a predominantly Latino cast was about to debut [35]. The Premiere Weekend Club dubbed this mobilization "Million Moviegoer March" which would be organized with the assistance of various Latino groups and media outlets [35]. The prospect of having a million Latino moviegoers paying about $8 to $9 per movie ticket admission was a

formidable box office figure, especially since most U.S. Latino films are low-budget productions. The Premiere Weekend Club hoped that this financial reward for Hollywood distributors would encourage them to produce more positive Latino films [35].

Hollywood's inability to produce an effective marketing and distribution plan for U.S. Latino films and Spanish-language films led to the emergence of four Latino-oriented distributors -- Arenas Entertainment, New Latin Pictures, Latin Universe, and Hombre D'Oro. After a lengthy period of not having a single Spanish-language or U.S. Latino distributor in the United States, these four distributors were convinced that they could release these films and secure screens in English-language multiplexes and art houses. Each company felt that the resurgence of film production throughout Latin America, marked by an increase in quality of films being produced in Mexico, would provide enough movies for Spanish-speaking Latinos. More importantly, these distributors were convinced that they could secure enough screens and create enough visibility for its films in order to generate a respectable box office return that would allow them to effectively compete with Hollywood studios, specialty distributors, and other independents.

The U.S. Latino distributor that appeared to be the most promising in its ability to secure screens and to provide its film product with an effective publicity campaign is Arenas Entertainment. The company's founder and president Santiago Pozo has a long track record of successfully promoting U.S. Latino films like *Selena*. In addition, he has handled several Latino-oriented campaigns for the studio films like *An American Tail*

[36]. He had earned so much respect in this market that he was able to garner the financial support of Universal Pictures and Marco Polo Investments [36]. Under this agreement, he would acquire, produce, finance, promote, and circulate films to Latinos throughout the world [36]. If Pozo develops a successful venture, Universal has the option of increasing its financial investment on the company [36]. The company intends to debut four or five films a year that targeted a growing number of Latino audiences.

New Latin Pictures had experience some success with Spanish-language films. This distributor circulated the lucrative *Nueba Yol* (1996, 1998) series. *Nueba Yol* a film about a Dominican widower, who comes to New York in search of a better life, generated a box office gross of $1.3 million. Its sequel, *Nueba Yol 3,* grossed over $790,000 in four territories. The key element in the success of the Nueba Yol series was rekindling the populist Latino cinema or the tradition of Spanish-speaking audiences going to Spanish-language films [37]. New Latin Pictures hoped to rekindle this spirit by bringing films to both Latino area theaters and mainstream multiplexes [38]. More importantly, the company's marketing plan acknowledged that Latinos were not a homogenous group, and altered the advertising strategy of *Nueba Yol* from region to region in order to attract the maximum number of Latino moviegoers [37]. For example, New Latin Pictures tailored an advertising campaign that specifically targeted New York's Dominicans by dubbing the film as a "Dominican triumph." Where the Dominican population is not very large, it promoted this film as a "Latino triumph." Despite its success with Spanish-language films, New Latin Picture's only venture with a U.S. Latino film, *Luminarias*, was not nearly as profitable.

In contrast, Latin Universe released only one Spanish-language film, *Santitos*. This distributor wanted to secure screens on mainstream multiplex theaters for its Spanish-language films. Its first film was *Santitos*, a 1999 Sundance Jury Award Winner, about a young, religious widow, who suddenly loses her daughter to a mysterious virus [39]. After a vision of St. Jude, the widow is led to believe that her daughter is not dead, but was kidnapped [39]. Her journey to seek the truth about her daughter takes her to the United States [39]. It was the first Spanish-language film to be widely released in 20 years [40]. Latin Universe aggressively circulated *Santitos* in a nine-state, 155-theater release [41]. Its distribution plan was unique and risky, because most small distributors slowly release a film in a few theaters before broadening its circulation to many theaters. This distributor's combination of a Spanish-language advertising campaign along with securing only mainstream multiplexes was not a successful strategy, since the film only generated a box office of $420,000 [40].

Shortly after the disappointing box-office figures of *Santitos*, Latin Universe went out of business. Latin Universe made huge marketing errors with this motion picture. One of the most obvious errors was not implementing an English-language publicity campaign, despite positive reviews and "free" publicity from the *Los Angeles Times*. The distributor also did not release its film in the art house circuit, thus eliminating a valuable potential audience. As David Rosen argues, "the art house crowd" encompasses more sophisticated filmgoers who are displeased with most of Hollywood's films [42, p. 245]. More importantly, they are often enthusiastic about independent and alternative films that express a unique or compelling point of view [42, p. 245-46]. Lastly, this company did

not release *Santitos* slowly. Latin Universe aggressively released the film and never allowed it to develop any "legs" or word-of-mouth among moviegoers. As a result, the film quickly disappeared from theaters.

Hombre D'Oro also distributed one film titled *La Otra Conquista* (*The Other Conquest*) (1998). The film tells the story of an Aztec after the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards. The distributor attempted to circulate this Spanish-language film to both Latino and art film audiences in Southern California [43]. The head of the company, Mitch Goldman, was confident that the right Spanish-language film could make money, if marketed correctly [44]. Simultaneously, he was critical of Latin Universe's marketing plan [44]. The company implemented an expensive $1 million regional English and Spanish-language advertising campaign and secured 74 mainstream multiplexes and art film theaters throughout Southern California [44]. However, after an impressive gross of $400,000 in its first five days, the film lost its legs and only generated a cumulative box office of $915,000 [44].

While the new Spanish-language film distributors generally failed to produce a hit and foreign films only accounted for 1.5% of movie tickets sold, Hollywood distributors did manage to release a few successful Latin American films like Brazil's *Central Station* (1997), Argentina's *Tango* (1998), Spain's *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* (1999), and Mexico's *Amores Perros* (2000) [45]. The most aggressive of specialty distributor of Latin American films was Sony Picture Classics. It circulated *Todo Sobre Mi Madre*, *Central Station*, and *Tango*. *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* was the most successful film of this era. The distributor took advantage of the film's victory at 2000 Academy Awards, as it won the

Best Foreign Language film. After earning an Oscar, *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* had a lengthy theatrical run of 34 weeks and earned about $8 million at the box office. The lengthy run of this film illustrated that U.S. art film audiences would attend good Latin American motion pictures.

U.S. distributors also benefited greatly from the renaissance of the Mexican film industry. After a long period of failing to produce many excellent films, Mexico began to develop and release an impressive string of critically acclaimed motion pictures. The emergence of *Amores Perros* was extraordinary, because the film industry was in dire straits financially for most of the decade. The situation was so miserable that in 1997, veteran actors and filmmakers united and demonstrated in an attempt to save the struggling film industry [46]. The Mexican government finally gave some much-needed funds to IMCINE in December 1997 [47]. Simultaneously, President Zedillo replaced the current head, Diego Lopez, with Eduardo Amerena [47]. A huge turning point for the Mexican film industry was the success of both *La Otra Conquista* and *Sexo, Pudor, y Lagrimas* (1999). *La Otra Conquista* grossed more than $2 million at the box office, which broke the Mexican box-office record [43]. In the following year, *Sexo, Pudor, y Lagrimas* shattered *La Otra Conquista's* all-time box office record [48]. After the box office triumph of both of these motion pictures, Mexican investors realized that a domestic picture could attract Mexican audiences, if it produced an excellent movies and promoted the motion picture correctly [48]. By 2001, the Mexican film industry had been reinvigorated by domestic film production, new movie theaters, and the easing of unofficial censorship on Mexican filmmakers [49]. The future of Mexican films will

remain bright as long as Mexican film investors are able to take advantage of the large number of Latinos and art film audiences in the U.S., as a potential source of additional revenue for its films.

The Promotion of Late 1990s-2001 U.S. Latino Films

While Mexican and Latin American films like *Amores Perros*, *Central Station*, and *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* were performing better at the box office, many U.S. Latino films continued to struggle, as most of these movies were released in non-competitive windows when movie-going generally drops nationwide and studios release their less appealing motion pictures. Despite trying to avoid highly competitive months, many of these U.S. Latino independent films, similar to the majority of art films, failed to gross even $2 million, because they had a difficult time securing a sufficient number of theaters to generate a significant box office gross. Even some of independent films like *Girlfight* that were well received at film festivals struggled to secure a large number of theaters. In this section, I provide a brief summary of the fourteen U.S. Latino and hybrid Latino films released in between 1996 to 2001. More specifically, I quickly examine how distributors of U.S. Latino films promoted these motion pictures.

Star Maps (1997) centers on Carlos (Douglas Spain), who comes to Los Angeles from Mexico with high aspirations of becoming an actor, but first he must overcome his dysfunctional father (Efrain Figueroa) to achieve his dream [50]. His career appears to be going nowhere until he meets an actress, who gets him get a small part in a soap opera, which potentially could launch his career and completely alter his life. Despite the fact that the film did not cast any highly commercial stars, Fox Searchlight acquired *Star*

Maps after being premiered at Sundance. The most marketable element of the film was the film's talented director Miguel Arteta, who struggled to finance this motion picture.

Shortly after being purchased, Fox Searchlight debuted the film in five Los Angeles and New York theaters in July, generating a mid-week box of $12,202 [51]. The film was especially successful at the Laemmle Sunset in West Hollywood [51]. The distributor expanded the release of the film to cities with large Latino populations like San Antonio, Dallas, San Francisco, and Phoenix [52, p.325]. According to *Variety*, *Star Maps* received limited distribution that never exceeded more than 40 screens. The film had a seven-week theatrical run and earned a little more than $590,000, a disappointing figure when one considers that it was acquired for $2.5 million and it cost $1 million to produce.

The Disappearance of Garcia Lorca (1997) focuses on Ricardo Fernandez (Esai Morales), an expatriate writer, who wants to solve the mysterious disappearance and subsequent death of Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca and his brother at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War [53]. The young writer must put his life on the line to shed light on this embarrassing portion of Spanish history. The film had a strong cast that featured Esai Morales, Andy Garcia, and Edward James Olmos. Both Esai Morales and Edward James Olmos were well known within the Mexican-American community for their performance in *My Family/Mi Familia*. Andy Garcia had starred previously in successful mainstream films like *When Man Loves a Woman* (1994). Nevertheless, this film on a little known Spanish poet received limited distribution. Triumph Films released *The Disappearance of Garcia Lorca* in September of 1997 and was screened for three weeks

on no more than thirty screens and generated a box office gross of a little more than $272,150.

Producer Moctesuma Esparza contended that despite the fact that *The Disappearance of Garcia Lorca* had a strong cast, Triumph Films, the film's distributor, did not perceive that this film had a great deal of commercial appeal. As a result, Triumph Films had two choices. The distributor could promote the film aggressively to develop visibility with American audiences or simply circulate the film on a limited basis in order to meet its contractual agreements. Then, Triumph Films would release the film on video and attempt to make a profit. Esparza explains why the distributor ultimately decided to release the film on video (personal communication, August 13, 2002).

> [The investors] saw they could have a higher profit margin by going straight to video than releasing theatrically, because their investment was so low. Had their investment been different and they had invested $14 million in the U.S.-- then they would have been compelled to release it theatrically. Since that was not the case -- it was a strictly an economic decision.

The distributors' decision to go to video after a short theatrical run did not attract a great deal of interest from video buyers. The film only generated $900,000 in video sales.

Latin Boys Go to Hell (1997) primarily centers on Justin Vega (Irwin Ossa), a young, homosexual, Latino adult living in a Brooklyn flat. At his job, he meets a model named Carlos (Mike Ruiz). After Justin and Carlos sleep together, this sets off a chain of events that affect several people, especially the bi-sexual Braulio (Alexis Artiles), who is Carlos' temporary boyfriend. *Latin Boys go to Hell* did not have any stars with name recognition. Most of the featured actors were making their first feature film. While this

film revolved around Latinos, the film's subject matter most likely would not appeal to most Latino or general moviegoers. Strand Releasing launched this film in September on two screens. During its opening week, the film generated a box-office of $24,335. *Latin Boys go to Hell* ultimately earned a box-office gross of $199,000 in its theatrical run.

Fools Rush In (1997) is about an intercultural relationship between Alex Whitman (Matthew Perry) and Isabel Fuentes (Salma Hayek), who have a one-night stand, which results in a pregnancy. This hybrid Latino-themed film featured a mainstream television star Matthew Perry and Latino actress Salma Hayek. Matthew Perry was not a notable movie star, although he was well known for his role as Chandler Bing in the popular NBC television series *Friends*. The beautiful Salma Hayek was a Mexican television and movie star before coming to the United States. She was probably best known for her starring role in Robert Rodriguez's *Desperado*.

In February, Sony Pictures premiered *Fools Rush In*. The distributor used Salma Hayek's name recognition among Latino audiences to target these moviegoers by releasing subtitle prints in some Southern California theaters and a single New York theater [54]. In addition, Sony utilized a rare distribution strategy that Columbia Pictures used during the *La Bamba* campaign [54]. The studio simultaneously booked an English print and a print with Spanish subtitles at nine theaters in Southern California and two theaters in Texas [54]. Moviegoers were then given a choice to which version they preferred [54]. Although the English language version performed better than the subtitled version at most of the eleven theaters that both prints, the subtitled version still earned an average of $6,200 per screen [54]. This box office figure represented a slightly

higher average than the national average of $5,803 [54]. The distributor considered the experiment to be a moderate success [54]. This led Sony Pictures Releasing President Jeff Blake to state that the studio would attempt the bilingual strategy more broadly in the future [54]. Sony Pictures debuted the film on over 1,650 screens and grossed over $11 million. However, after a strong opening week, the box office figures for *Fools Rush In* dropped. Ultimately, the motion picture earned $29.2 million at the box office in its 16-week theatrical run. The film may have produced a small profit for Sony Pictures, since it cost $17 million to produce.

Knockout (2000) is about Isabelle's (Sophia-Adella Hernandez) quest to avenge the savage beating endured by her friend (Gina La Piana) at the hands' of the formidable Tanya "Terminator" Tessaro (Fredia Gibbs) [55]. *Knockout's* most marketable element was its soundtrack that featured Sheila E. and Jose Feliciano. The film's primary star was Sophia Adella-Hernandez. However, Adella-Hernandez was not a marketable star, because *Knockout* was her first feature film. Maria Conchita-Alonso was the film's most well known cast member, but she was not a commercial star even within the Latino community. Renegade Entertainment premiered *Knockout* on 110 screens in February and grossed about $80,600. On the following week for the distributor reduced the scope of the release to about 50 screens and generated an additional $47,000. *Knockout* grossed about $169,000 during its theatrical run of approximately two weeks.

Girlfight (2000) focuses on Diana (Michelle Rodriguez), a tough Latina from New York City, who uses boxing as a healthy and positive outlet for her anger [56]. As she begins excel as a boxer, she simultaneously begins to fall for Adrian (Santiago

Douglas), another promising boxer at the gym. Screen Gems, the specialty division for Sony Pictures, acquired *Girlfight* at the Sundance Film Festival, where it had received a great deal of acclaim [57]. The film starred the little-known Michelle Rodriguez in her first feature film. After Screen Gems obtained the distribution rights to the film, director Karyn Kusama, did not completely agree with the distributor's marketing campaign [58]. Kusama and producer Martha Griffin contended that Screen Gems did not market the film "as a coming-of-age film about a misunderstood and bitter young woman" [59]. Instead, Kusama stated the film was marketed as a feel-good story [58]. She also asserted that Screen Gem's marketing campaign, which cost about $5 million, never emphasized Rodriguez's intensity or fierceness [59]. The one-sheets for the film never took advantage of this perspective. The distributor also did not utilize Michelle Rodriguez to market the film through public appearances [59].

Martha Griffin believed that the Screen Gems did not aggressively pursue the Spanish-language market, which was one of the target markets for the film, since the film centers on a Puerto Rican [59]. She argued that only a few people know how to tap this large group of moviegoers [59]. Screens Gems disagreed with Griffin's assertions. They contended that Rodriguez was profiled in several Spanish-language newspapers and bilingual magazines, such as *Latina* [59]. In addition, they opened the motion picture at the Latino Film Festival in New York [59]. Lastly, they purchased television advertising on Spanish-language stations and hired Maracas Entertainment for its Spanish-language advertising campaign [59]. Valerie Van Galder, the executive vice president of marketing at Screen Gems, says, "In my opinion, the fact that you are of Hispanic

heritage does not necessarily mean you are going to see a movie where the lead actress is of Hispanic heritage as well" [59].

Beyond Latino audiences, Screen Gems tried to attract urban audiences, especially young females [59]. It developed a marketing partnership with Bally's to appeal to young females who were taking boxing lessons [59]. The distributor also promoted the film's soundtrack on MTV, VH1, and urban radio stations that appeal to younger audiences [59]. Despite these efforts, Screen Gem's marketing campaign failed to resonate with young females or urban Latino or Black moviegoers. While female boxing and basketball are becoming more common on television, the film's subject matter did not capture the imagination of females or of male boxing fans. Females apparently did not necessarily want to see a film about a female boxer [59].

After premiering at the Sundance Film Festival, Screen Gems debuted *Girlfight* on 28 screens in late September and earned $200,000 at the box office [59]. In its second week, Sony expanded the film's run to over 250 screens but box office results of $680,000 were disappointing [58]. At this point, *Girlfight's* director Karyn Kusama alleges that, "Sony got cold feet. They weren't getting the numbers they wanted and then they stopped advertising it altogether. It died on the vine quickly" [58]. *Girlfight* had a short theatrical run of only four weeks and grossed about $1.7 million.

Woman on Top (2000) focuses on Isabella (Penelope Cruz), a beautiful young chef from Bahia, who becomes the star of her own cooking show [60]. Simultaneously, two men vie for her love. This film represented the first time that the Spanish actress Penelope Cruz was the primary star of an American film. Prior to this role, she had a

supporting role in *The Hi-Lo Country* (1998). *Woman on Top* did not have any other well-known stars. During the film's opening week, Fox Searchlight aggressively circulated the film on nearly 1100 screens in late September and generated a box office of over 2.6 million. After a respectable debut, *Woman on Top* lost a lot of steam. *Woman on Top* had a five-week theatrical run and generated a box office of about $5 million. The film was a slight box office disappointment, because the film cost $8 million to produce.

Before Night Falls (2000) is an autobiography on gay Cuban novelist Reinado Arenas (Javier Bardem) [61]. The film featured Javier Bardem, who was best known for his roles in Spanish films like *Jamon Jamon* (1992). However, this actor did not have name recognition outside of art film audiences. In addition, the subject matter was also a bit obscure for mainstream audiences. Consequently, Ivette Rodriguez, President of American Entertainment Marketing, whose company handled the marketing for the film, targeted sophisticated audiences. The marketer did not run any advertising on Spanish language media and only bought a little bit of print. Rodriguez describes the target audiences and the grassroots marketing campaign for the film (personal communication, February 4, 2003).

> We went after the Latino audience and the gay audience, which in LA it is easy to mix the two. We did something with *QV* magazine. We did a promotion with Out of the Closet. You know those stores that are across the Southland. We worked with them. We chose a group of stores that we targeted where we put up posters, points-of-purchase, (and) some kinds of postcards. Everyone that bought something would get a one-sheet in (her or his) bags. We went to the clubs. (We did) street, club, and retail.

Fine Line slowly released *Before Night Falls* on eight screens in late December and produced a box office gross of nearly $143,000. The film's tricky subject matter forced the distributor to gradually expand the scope of the release until it reached an apex of 127 screens and produced the film's highest box office of $494,000 during its tenth week. The distributor took advantage of Javier Bardem's extraordinary performance, which earned him various awards, including an Oscar nomination, to extend the film's run. The motion picture had a long theatrical run of 17 weeks, which generated a box office of about $4.2 million.

Lions Gate's *Bread and Roses* (2000) is based on the long "Justice for Janitors" campaign that attempted to improve salaries and working conditions for these invisible office workers [62]. The film centers on Maya's (Pilar Padilla) and Sam's (Adrien Brody) efforts to unionize janitors, who are often mistreated and underpaid, in Los Angeles [62]. Simultaneously, her idealism strains her relationship with her older sister Rosa (Elpidia Carrillo). The cast included Pilar Padilla, Adrien Brody, and Elpidia Carrillo, who were not bankable stars with American audiences. Nevertheless, Lions Gate circulated this film. The distributor hired American Entertainment Marketing to market the film to the public. President Ivette Rodriguez describes how her company attempted to market the film (personal communication, February 4, 2003).

> For *Bread and Roses*, we really reached out to the masses. We created a television spot and radio spot. We bought time for both radio and television. We went out to the masses. We went to Whittier Narrows for a Cinco de Mayo event and Fiesta Broadway. We had a bunch of people walking around with T-shirts that said "Justice for Janitors". We thought we could sell that movie, as sort of that struggle that we all envision when

> a person crosses the border and what they go through for the American dream.

Furthermore, the motion picture received some free publicity when the *Los Angeles Times* covered the North American premiere of Lion's Gate *Bread and Roses*. The distributor conducted its debut screening to unionized janitors in Century City (Los Angeles, California) [63]. It was the same site where a violent conflict took place in 1990 between the police and janitors, who wanted better working conditions. During *Bread and Rose's* opening week in late May, the film appeared on 34 screens with a box office of about $70,000. The motion picture received limited distribution that never exceeded 39 screens. *Bread and Roses* had a run of about seven weeks that grossed about $525,000.

Our Song (2000) is a coming of age film that centers on three female teenagers Lanisha, a mix Latina - Black teenager (Kerry Washington), Joy (Anna Simpson), and Maria (Melissa Martinez), who are growing up in New York City's Crown Heights. Although they are best friends, they encounter some tough life decisions prior to their sophomore year in high school that threatens their friendship. The hybrid U.S. Latino film was screened at the Sundance Film Festival and MOMA's New Directors/New Films [64]. However, a distributor did not acquire *Our Song* until IFC picked up the film in November 2000. The film did not have any marketable stars. The film's director Jim McKay, who previously directed *Girls Town* (1996), was the most notable talent attached to the film. *Our Song* premiered on one screen in late May 2001 and earned over

$20,000. This motion picture received limited distribution that never exceeded more than 12 screens. *Our Song* grossed about $273,000 over its 18-week theatrical run.

Tortilla Soup (2001) was the Latino version of *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), a film about an Asian family [65]. The motion picture focuses on the Naranjos, a tight-knitted Latino family, which consists of a father (Hector Elizondo) and three daughters: Leticia (Elizabeth Pena), Carmen (Jacqueline Obradors), Maribel (Tamara Mello). Each family member is encountering a crossroads in their lives ranging from pursuing a relationship to changing careers. The film features Elizabeth Pena and Hector Elizondo. While both of these actors have had significant roles, neither of these actors was highly marketable. Samuel Goldwyn debuted the film on about 200 screens in late August and grossed about $855,000. The following week Samuel Goldwyn broadened the release to 220 screens and earned over $1,090,000, which was its most lucrative week. After two excellent weeks, the distributor slowly reduced the number of screens, as box office grosses plummeted. *Tortilla Soup* had a 12-week theatrical run that generated a box office about $4.4 million.

Pinero (2001) chronicles the short life of the talented but self-destructive Nuyorican poet-playwright-actor Miguel Pinero (Benjamin Bratt), who produces a successful play called “Short Eyes” [66]. The film was part of Miramax’s strategy to appeal to Latino audiences by featuring Benjamin Bratt [67]. Bratt recently had starred with Sandra Bullock in *Miss Congeniality* (2000). In addition, he was Detective Reynaldo Curtis on NBC’s *Law & Order*. However, the subject matter about a little known poet made this film a tricky marketing problem for Miramax [68]. In this

particular case, the film needed audiences to generate a positive word-of-mouth response about Bratt's performance in order to attract additional moviegoers. The distributor also needed to develop an aggressive promotional campaign for this film [68].

Miramax launched *Pinero* in mid-December on two screens. December premieres can be a difficult time for art films, because distributors often release their high-prestige films that they believe can attract holiday crowds and garner an Academy Award nomination. Consequently, the film only received limited distribution from Miramax, which apparently did not strongly support the film. *Pinero* was screened on 21 theaters at its broadest point. The film had a short theatrical run of four weeks that grossed about $302,000 at the box office.

King of the Jungle (2001) centered on Seymour (John Leguizamo), a slightly retarded young man, who lives in a rough part of New York City [69]. After a local thug kills Seymour's mother Mona (Julie Carmen), he gets a gun for protection and launches a vendetta against this gang member [69, 70]. The film had a marketable cast that included John Leguizamo, Rosie Perez, Annabella Sciorra, and Marisa Tomei. However, after the film premiered at the 2000 Los Angeles Independent Film Festival [70]. *King of the Jungle* was not widely released by UrbanWorld Films. The motion picture was screened on one screen in New York in early November and earned a box office of about $11,000. On the following week, *King of the Jungle* debuted in Los Angeles. The film was screened on four screens and earned a meager $16,000. *King of the Jungle* had a short theatrical run of two weeks and earned approximately $27,000.

Crazy/Beautiful (2001) is about an intercultural teen relationship between Nicole Oakley (Kirsten Dunst), a dysfunctional, Pacific Palisades rich girl and Carlos Nunez, a straight-A student, football player, Mexican-American guy from the barrio. The movie featured Kristen Dunst, who had been a rising star since *Interview with the Vampire* (1994). In addition, she recently had appeared in the successful *Bring It On* (2000). In contrast, Jay Hernandez had never starred in a Hollywood feature film. He was probably best known for his role in NBC's *Hang Time* where he played Antonio Lopez from 1998 to 2000. *Crazy/Beautiful* also featured a bilingual soundtrack that included rapper Mellow Man Ace, nortena artist Serralde, and the popular Chilean group La Ley.

Buena Vista Pictures launched *Crazy/Beautiful* in late June and earned $4.7 million on over 1,600 screens. During its second week, the film's box office escalated to $7.1 million. The film's box office totals for its third week dropped to $3.4 million. By its fourth week, the motion picture had lost much of its legs and the distributor reduced the number of prints in circulation. *Crazy/Beautiful* had a theatrical run of 9 weeks and earned $16.9 million. Buena Vista Pictures lost a little bit of money during its theatrical run, since the distributor most likely did not recoup the film's production cost of $14 million.

The independent U.S. Latino films like *The Disappearance of Garcia Lorca* (Triumph Films), *Latin Boys go to Hell* (Strand Releasing), *Our Song* (IFC), *Knockout* (Renegade Entertainment) and *King of the Jungle* (UrbanWorld) did not produce high box office grosses, simply because they were not aggressively promoted nor distributed by its distributors. Despite having a strong Latino cast, Triumph Films elected to meet

its contractual obligation and only released *The Disappearance of Garcia Lorca* for a few weeks rather than really promote this film in the U.S. Perhaps influenced by the subject matter, Strand Releasing elected to only debut *Latin Boys go to Hell* in gay markets instead of releasing the motion picture art markets or college towns. IFC did not aggressively distribute *Our Song*. In addition, the distributor did not do a good job of getting the film reviewed by the Spanish-language media or Latino oriented media even though two of the leading cast members were Latino or Latino/Black that could have attracted a larger audience. In spite of a strong and multi-cultural cast, UrbanWorld decided to only release *King of the Jungle* in two markets rather than launching its film broadly. Of these smaller companies, Renegade Entertainment was the only distributor to debut its film on over 100 screens. However, *Knockout* did not have any marketable qualities and quickly lost its theatrical legs. These small film distributors apparently had a difficult time securing a high number of screens. In addition, they did not have the promotional budgets to remain visible and sustain long theatrical runs. As a result, none of these films earned more than $300,000 at that box office. The lack of financial success was common for many smaller distributors in this period.

A few U.S. Latino art films like *Star Maps* (Fox Searchlight), *Bread and Roses* (Lion's Gate), and *Pinero* (Miramax) failed to earn even $1 million. These films had substandard results despite receiving good reviews from influential newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times*. The only U.S. Latino art film to produce a box office gross of $5 million was Fox Searchlight's *Woman on Top*. However, the film distributor had to debut this film on more than 1000 screens on its opening week in order to squeeze out the

figure. These distributors did not have much success despite attempting a variety of strategies ranging from widely releasing films on over 1000 screens, to limited releases ranging from 20-200 screens, to platform patterns that debut in one or two markets and slowly expanded its scope.

Regardless of the strategy, *Before Night Falls* and *Tortilla Soup* were the two motion pictures within this group that had a theatrical run longer than twelve weeks and produced a box office larger than $4 million. Both of these film distributors implemented different strategies. Fine Line implemented a platform distribution strategy that slowly expanded the scope of its release, as the film's word of mouth grew, especially after Javier Bardem received an Oscar nomination for Best Actor. The film's marketer also did not directly target only Latino audiences. Instead, the marketer quite successfully targeted sophisticated and educated individuals like art film audiences. On the other hand, Samuel Goldwyn aggressively debuted *Tortilla Soup* on over 200 screens for two consecutives weeks. The distributor implemented a promotional campaign that appealed to both Latino and art film moviegoers. First, the distributor made it clear that it was about a Latino family. Next, Samuel Goldwyn appealed to art film audiences, who enjoyed *Eat Drink Man Woman*, by stating that this film was similar to that particular motion picture.

Perhaps, the biggest disappointment among these motion pictures was Screen Gem's *Girlfight*. The film garnered a great deal of acclaim at the Sundance Film Festival. However, *Girlfight* never resonated with urban audiences despite a strong publicity push by Screen Gems. The film had disappointing box office figures, because

Screen Gems did not center its promotional campaign on Michelle Rodriguez. The distributor could have highlighted not only the fierceness of the character, but her attractiveness through public appearances in order to appeal to more teenagers and young adult males. Lastly, the distributor did not hire an experienced film marketer, who specializes in the Spanish-language and U.S. Latino market.

The hybrid U.S. Latino films of this period like *Fools Rush In* and *Crazy/Beautiful* that were released by Hollywood studios were also box office disappointments. Sony Pictures and Buena Vista Pictures centered their motion pictures on intercultural relationships that featured a Latino and a fairly well known Anglo actor/actress in order to improve their crossover appeal. Sony Pictures aggressively targeted Latino audiences by simultaneously releasing subtitled prints. In addition, the film's marketing campaign heavily featured Salma Hayek. On the other hand, Buena Vista Pictures tried to utilize its bilingual soundtrack in order to appeal to mainstream and Latino teen and young adult moviegoers. But, the distributor did not appear to really promote Jay Hernandez to Latino audiences through public appearances. In conclusion, neither of these studio films like *Fools Rush In* and *Crazy/Beautiful* that centered on intercultural relationships were able to sustain much momentum as they produced box office grosses of under $30 million.

Case Studies

The following five film distributors implemented a variety of promotional strategies ranging from a multi-million dollar studio campaign to grassroots marketing. *Selena*, a film about the slain Tejano singer, represented the first studio (Warner Bros.)

film to initially target Mexican-American moviegoers. Selena's untimely death attracted a lot of attention from the Mexican-American community throughout the country. However, it was unclear if this film about a young Latina singer would resonate with mainstream audiences. Warner Bros. felt confident that this film would experience success similar to *La Bamba*. *Price of Glory* was the second U.S. Latino film to be debuted by New Line Cinema. In contrast to its first film *My Family/Mi Familia*, this motion picture was about a boxing family from Arizona. It was unclear how the distributor would market this film, since there had been few sports films that centered on a Latino family in recent memory.

The next two films, *Gabriela* and *Luminarias*, had much smaller marketing budgets than either *Selena* or *Price of Glory* and did not cast bankable talent. As a result, both of these distributors could not rely on a great deal of television advertising or a well-known actor/actress to promote their film. For instance, *Gabriela's* distributor Power Point had to implement unique distribution plans like releasing the film market-by-market and using the Internet to create awareness. On the other hand, the film's distributor New Latin Pictures had experienced some success with circulating *Nueba Yol* within the Latino communities on the East Coast in 1996. This film would represent its first effort in promoting a Mexican-American film. In addition, *Luminarias* would be New Latin Pictures' initial attempt to debut a film on the West Coast.

Lastly, *Spy Kids*, a film about a family of spies, represents the most successful U.S. Latino film in the history of American filmmaking. Despite the fact the film's talent is primarily Latino, Dimension Films, the distributor, did not label the film as a Latino

motion picture. It promoted *Spy Kids* as a kids' film. The distributor developed a wide array of promotional tie-ins with various fast food restaurants and toy makers to create awareness among kids. The distributor created a buzz among moviegoers without allowing *Spy Kids* to be labeled as an ethnic film.

These case studies focus on two low-budget independent and three studio-affiliated films. The marketers and producers of these films had different target audiences in mind and, as a result, they opted to sell their films in a variety of different ways. For instance, Dimension implemented a dual marketing plan for *Spy Kids*. The distributor opted to promote this film to general audiences as a kids film. In its Latino campaign, Dimension marketed this motion picture as a story with many Latino characters. In contrast, while these films were promoted to general audiences, the marketers of *Price of Glory* and *Selena* aggressively targeted Latino audiences. Lastly, the distributors of *Luminarias* and *Gabriela* had to rely on grassroots marketing campaigns to promote their films. In this section, through personal interviews and intensive research, I examine which of the following strategies were effective in attracting audiences to their films.

Selena

Selena centers on the short life and meteoric rise of Tejana singer Selena Quintanilla (Jennifer Lopez), who was tragically murdered at the age of 23 by an employee [71]. The planning stages for the development of a film about her life began almost immediately after her sudden death. Afterwards, Abraham Quintanilla hired Montesuma Esparaza, an experienced Latino producer, to produce *Selena*. Subsequently,

Esparza hired Santiago Pozo to promote the motion picture (Santiago Pozo, personal communication, July 8, 2003). The early hiring of Pozo was beneficial, because he immediately began to design a well thought out Spanish-language marketing campaign before the script even existed. In addition, Pozo would have enough money to implement a multi-media, multi-million dollar campaign that targeted the core audience of Selena, which was a "hard-core Hispanic market" (S. Pozo, personal communication, July 8, 2003). According to Santiago Pozo, it was the first time that he would have enough money to develop an effective Spanish-language marketing campaign. Prior to *Selena*, the average film spent only about a few hundred thousand dollars for its national buys.

Selena captured a great deal of positive publicity when there was a national casting call to locate both the young and adult Selenas. Nancy De Los Santos, the film's associate producer, contends that the national casting call was not a publicity stunt. She asserts, "The goal was to find the actors to play these two roles. It was not publicity" (N. De Los Santos, personal communication, July 3, 2003). Nevertheless, Del Los Santos stated that the film's casting call received great deal of attention from the media (personal communication, July 3, 2003).

> The casting call was covered all over by television. I was so proud just for the success of that. It really turned out well. We got a lot of publicity that was really unexpected. We were going out to do a national casting call. I knew people would be interested in it, but the next day picking up the *Los Angeles Times* and seeing this picture of three little Selenas in color on the top half of the paper. At that point, you never saw Latinos' pictures in a happy photograph on the top half of the *Los Angeles Times*.

Director Gregory Nava eventually selected Jennifer Lopez to star as *Selena* in her first starring role. Prior to this film, she co-starred in the multi-ethnic film *Money Train*

(1995) and had a supporting role in *My Family/Mi Familia*. The remainder of the cast like Edward James Olmos, Constance Marie, and Jacob Vargas were also featured in *My Family/Mi Familia*. The other co-star of the film was Jon Seda, who probably was best known for his role in *I Like It Like That*. These actors would be vital in promoting the film to the Latino community through public appearances and interviews.

During its production phase, *Selena* continued to receive a great deal of positive publicity. In order to keep a buzz within the community, Nancy De Los Santos and Carolina Caldera went out into the neighborhoods. They encouraged people to come out and join in the production of the film. Nancy De Los Santos described what they did during the production phase to keep people excited. "We did everything from handing out flyers to going on every Tejano (radio) station that would have us and there were many, because we were the big deal there in San Antonio, Texas and in Corpus Christi, Texas." The success of their publicity during the production phase was evident when about 32,000 fans showed up for a scene at the Alamodome, which doubled for the Astrodome concert scene. Another 8,000 fans showed up to another concert scene in Poteet, Texas, a little town, south of San Antonio, which doubled for a Monterrey, Mexico concert scene [72]. During the filming of this scene, the producers along with PMG, a San Antonio marketing firm, created the Selena Movie Festival [72]. In between shooting, comedian Rick Gutierrez and musical acts like Jenifer y Los and Pete Astudillo entertained the large crowd [72].

Selena received a great deal of free publicity from both mainstream and Latino-oriented media. *Time* magazine ran a positive story on the film. *Cosmopolitan* did a

feature on Jennifer Lopez, who discussed the film. E! Entertainment Television aired the re-enactment of the Saldivar trial. *Hispanic* and *Hispanic Business* printed stories about the film. In addition, the film received vital free publicity from extremely popular talk show host in both Spanish and English. Christina Saralegui, a long-time Spanish television talk show host dedicated an entire show on behind the scenes footage of the motion picture. A few weeks later, Selena's family appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*.

Latina magazine provided a major boost for *Selena*, because both the publication and the motion picture had similar target markets -- young Latinas. Christy Haubegger, the founder of the magazine, came up with an idea to do a *Selena* promotional tour that would be sponsored by the magazine. Gabriel Reyes, a publicist for *Latina*, described the tour. "We paired up with local Latino charities and local organizations. We did premiere events, red carpet events, in about ten cities around the country with the talent. They served very well as grassroots screenings" (Gabriel Reyes, personal communication, June 26, 2003). De Los Santos credited Haubegger for the success of the tour. De Los Santos described Haubegger as "the absolute heroine of the movie" (personal communication, July 3, 2003).

While the tour was a hit with Latino audiences, it almost did not occur. According to De Los Santos, the Quintanilla family was upset about a one-page article written about Selena. The story described Selena as being a Madonna-whore archetype. Afterwards, the film's director Gregory Nava and the film's producer Montesuma Esparza sat down and talked to with Abraham Quintanilla. They finally were able to

convince Mr. Quintanilla to continue the tour. De Los Santos describes one of the concessions made in order to continue the tour (personal communication, July 3, 2003).

> When we did the screening in San Antonio, the *Latina* staff members were tearing out that page out of the magazine before the magazine could be distributed at the premiere. That was the concession that we all made. We could not do that everywhere, but we did it in San Antonio.

Banc One, in its pursuit of more Latino customers, also became a strong supporter of *Selena*. The bank's logo is prominently displayed in the film's opening sequence, as Selena was performing to a sold-out Astrodome surrounded by Banc One banners [73]. The tenth largest bank in the United States spent more than $1 million on marketing tie-ins with this film [74]. Bank branches also conducted sweepstakes that gave away tickets to the film [74]. It had screening parties in heavily populated Latino markets [74]. The bank placed Selena's image on its checks and began to offer these checks to customers [75]. Banc One publicized its affiliation with the film through radio spots [75]. The bank hoped that support of the film would translate into more customers, since Latinos often do respond positively when a company attempts to appeal to this audience directly through local events and Spanish-language advertising.

The potential popularity of *Selena* with the Latino community and the general market also attracted the attention of other mainstream companies such as Honda and J.C. Penney [74]. These companies sponsored thirteen screenings throughout the United States [74]. Other large corporations supported the film's soundtrack. For example, Budweiser and Coke placed displays in 10,000 retail stores that prominently featured Selena and the soundtrack [75]. They also offered prizes and giveaways. Major retailers

like Wal-Mart and Best Buy also proposed to put up displays that promoted the both the film and soundtrack [75]. The support of these mainstream stores for the soundtrack and the film was not surprising, because Selena was in the midst of becoming a huge crossover singer before her tragic death.

Prior to releasing either the soundtrack or the motion picture, Warner Bros. debuted the first single *Last Dance/The Hustle/On the Radio* from the *Selena* soundtrack throughout the nation [76]. They produced a music video that was sent to VH1 and MTV [76]. After the video, the film's soundtrack debuted in record stores about ten days prior to *Selena's* premiere. *Selena's* soundtrack featured songs in both English and Spanish. The bilingual nature of *Selena's* soundtrack eased Warner Bros. ability to develop both an English-language and Spanish-language marketing campaign [76]. For instance, its songs were being played on mainstream and Spanish-language radio stations. Lastly, VH1 aired a one-hour tribute to Selena prior to the film [76].

Selena was a highly anticipated film that Warner Bros. executives felt could potentially cross over to a mainstream audience with the assistance of its bilingual soundtrack and the media's coverage of the singer's tragic death. Furthermore, the distributor became more hopeful after the film received good reviews from prominent newspapers and trade publications like *The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times,* and *Variety*. Warner Bros. felt certain that *Selena* could surpass the box office figures of *La Bamba* and become the highest-grossing U.S. Latino film in Hollywood history [77]. It planned a wide release for the motion picture in order to take advantage of all of the

publicity the film was collecting at the time. In addition, Warner Bros. anticipated circulating a Spanish subtitled version in order to attract Spanish-speaking Latinos [71].

Warner Bros. hoped that its English-language advertising campaign would attract a mainstream audience that would allow the film to crossover. Warner Bros. expected that young girls would be would be drawn to the subject matter [71]. Barry Reardon, the president of distribution at Warner Bros., said, "We believe young girls could be buying this in a pretty strong way" [71]. Lynn Whitney claimed, "There's also a separate campaigned aimed at a broad crossover audience" [71]. Consequently, Warner Bros. did purchase advertisements on *The Simpsons*, *Moesha*, and *Friends* in order to attract a mainstream audience [71].

Warner Bros. premiered *Selena* on 1,850 screens in March and it started out strongly by grossing over $11 million, which surprisingly placed it number #2 on *Variety's* biggest office grosses for the week [77]. *Selena* performed excellently in markets with large Latino populations such as, Los Angeles (2.8 million), Dallas ($1.5 million), and New York ($1.4 million) [77]. At several San Antonio theaters the lines numbered into the thousands [77]. Warner Bros. expanded the number of theaters that screened *Selena* to over 1870 screens, and it generated a weekly box office gross of nearly $8.7 million during its second week.

After its successful opening two weeks, Montesuma Esparza, the producer of the film, called Gabriel Reyes to keep up the publicity for the film. Reyes attempted to publicize the talent that he had at his disposal. Reyes describes how he tried to continue

promoting the film by getting *Selena* additional exposure in the media (personal communication, June 26, 2003).

> This is a [promotional] strategy that we used and it helped in [getting] some [extra visibility] in the major markets. We made sure that the film remained on the mind of the consumers that is by doing a lot of radio interviews and making sure that the daily papers are still covering the film. Then, trying to figure out other strategies, other than when you talk to journalists, if they have already done a story on the film, you need to come back to them with another pitch. My pitches were everything from the success of the film, the good box offices we were achieving, the fact it was a groundbreaking film, the fact that it was Jennifer Lopez's first film, every kind of angle I used to keep the coverage fresh with newspapers.

In spite of Reyes' efforts, the film began to lose its legs by its third week. *Selena* earned $4.3 million on over 1580 screens. Warner Bros. reduced the scope of its release by the fourth week to 990 screens, which produced a weekly box office gross of about $2.3 million. Part of the problem was that *Selena* never crossed over to a mainstream audience, as over 85% of its audience was Latino [78]. Since, the film did not crossover to a mainstream audience, it was not able to sustain its momentum for a long period of time. *Selena* remained in theaters for thirteen weeks, but primarily in Latino markets. While the film was a hit within the Latino community, it fell well short of Warner Bros.' expectations, and only grossed a modest $35.7 million. Still, the film produced a small profit for Warners Bros. during its theatrical run, since it cost about $20 million to produce. After its theatrical run, *Selena* generated $29.4 million in video sales.

Moctesuma Esparza, the producer of *Selena*, believed that the publicity surrounding Selena's tragic death created a great deal of anticipation within the Latino community, especially among Latina girls (personal communication, August 13, 2002).

More importantly, Esparza credits Warner Bros.' dual language publicity campaign with its ability to attract a large number of both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking Latinos to the film. Warner Bros. spent about 80% of its marketing budget on reaching the English-speaking Latinos like young people and the native born. In addition, Esparza estimated that Warner Bros. spent approximately $2 million on Spanish-language advertising, which represented the highest figure ever. He credits *Selena's* Spanish-language campaign, along with the vast amount of other publicity, for attracting a large number of immigrant families to the film.

Price of Glory

Price of Glory focuses on an overbearing father and ex-boxer Arturo Ortega's (Jimmy Smits) relationship with his three young sons Sonny (Jon Seda), Jimmy (Clifton Collins Jr.), and Johnny (Ernesto Hernandez), who also raises them to be boxers [62]. The film featured only two cast members, Jimmy Smits and Jon Seda, which would have some name recognition with English-speaking Latinos. The motion picture featured Jimmy Smits starring in his first film. He was a co-star on *Mi Family/My Familia* and a television star. Jon Seda, the other co-star of *Price of Glory*, was best known for his role in *Selena* as Chris Perez, Selena's husband.

The producers of *Price of Glory* had some problems with the scope of New Line Cinema's initial distribution plan [79]. They envisioned a 1200 screen release, which is considered the minimum number of theaters for a mainstream crossover film [79]. However, New Line Cinema initially wanted to release the film on 400 screens [79]. This type of distribution pattern was familiar to *My Family/Mi Familia's* successful

campaign [79]. One of the reasons that New Line Cinema executives were fearful of a broad release was that a large number of people had to be solicited just to attend a free screening [79]. Eventually, the distributor decided to circulate the film on 800 screens [79]. New Line's distribution plan targeted cities with large Latino populations and disregarded large cities with few Latinos [79].

A marketing dilemma for the distributor was that the star of the film Jimmy Smits was generally unknown in Spanish-speaking households [79]. Many Spanish-speaking Latinos do not watch English-Language television and were not familiar with Smits' role on *NYPD Blues*. Consequently, New Line Cinema's Spanish-language marketing campaign would be ineffective in targeting its core audience. In order to improve his visibility with Spanish-speakers, Smits, despite his less-than-perfect Spanish, appeared on seven Spanish-speaking shows in a single week [79]. New Line Cinema hoped this would make their Spanish-language marketing campaign more effective. Nevertheless, Arthur Friedman, one of the producers of the film, contended that,

> Too much was focused on the Spanish-language media. Jimmy Smits is a mainstream star. This movie needed to be advertised to the mainstream on television. New Line didn't do anything wrong here intentionally. They had their own idea of what they wanted to do [43].

Prior to *Price of Glory*, promoting a film on this network had been described as a "no-brainer choice to reach the Latino demo" [80]. Furthermore, the distributor did not take advantage of Latino-oriented print media such as *Hispanic* magazine. This publication with a heavily bilingual or English-speaking Latino readership did not print an article on the film until its May edition, long after the motion picture's March premiere.

The producers of *Price of Glory* were especially disappointed with the lack of network television advertising during prime-time, which appeared only on the WB and Fox during late night shows [43]. Another example of why the *Price of Glory* producers were disappointed with New Line's promotional campaign occurred a month prior to the film's debut. The star of the film, Jimmy Smits, hosted ESPN's ESPY Awards on February 14, 2000. New Line Cinema failed to take full advantage of Smits appearance on ESPN's annual awards program, because the distributor only implemented a regional advertising campaign [43]. ESPN's limited audience also reduced the effectiveness of this media buy, as this cable channel is not typically a part of a cable's basic package. It is often a part of a cable service's premium packages. Consequently, the number of potential moviegoers that actually watched this awards program was significantly reduced by the size of the audience and by the regional scope of the campaign. Furthermore, advertisements that were supposed to be aired in Los Angeles were not broadcast due to a production mishap at the cable station [81]. New Line's overall publicity campaign disappointed the producers of the film. They felt that the movie should have been marketed as a universal story about boxing and not as a Latino film [43]. The producers of *Price of Glory* publicly criticized New Line in the *Los Angeles Times*. The distributor denied these accusations by stating that they supported *Price of Glory* with a comprehensive marketing and distribution plan [81]. It was quite evident that the producers and the distributor were never on the same page in terms of implementing an efficient mass media campaign.

New Line Cinema also failed to implement an effective grassroots marketing campaign by starting this portion of the marketing plan too late [43]. Grassroots marketing is often considered an effective tool to build a word of mouth through the use of community organizing. However, this type of campaign is ineffective if not supported by a strong media campaign [43]. Often an efficient grassroots campaign takes a long time to implement, because the marketer has to create awareness and anticipation through local organizations and events, which build slowly over time. In this particular case, Danny Haro, the person in charge of this operation, was given only three weeks prior to the premiere of the film to create a "buzz" for this motion picture [43]. The Latino community leaders were never given an opportunity to get the neighborhoods excited about this film.

Another reason why the film did not attract a sizeable audience was the producers' inability to secure a mainstream entertainer to produce a soundtrack for the motion picture. Bob Friedman, co-chairman of world-wide marketing of New Line, believed that a big Latino crossover musical star could potentially attract a mixed audience [79]. They wanted to develop a soundtrack that could be a springboard to box office success, similar to *La Bamba* [79]. New Line Cinema gave the film producers three options: Santana, Jennifer Lopez, and Ricky Martin [79]. Though they almost signed Santana, the producers failed to secure a popular Latino entertainer [79]. The producers settled for a good "rock en espanol" soundtrack, which would appeal to only Spanish-speaking and bilingual Latinos. However, the soundtrack would have little mainstream appeal to both

mainstream and English-speaking Latinos. It would also limit the amount of "free" plugs that result from receiving airplay to only Spanish-speaking radio stations.

Price of Glory received mixed reviews prior to being released. On the one hand, the film received a fairly good review from Eric Harrison of *The Los Angeles Times*. He thought the storyline was choppy, but enjoyed the performances of Smits, Seda, and Collins [82]. However, the film garnered negative reviews from *The New York Times* and *Variety*. *The New York Times* critic Lawrence Van Gelder described the film as too predictable as a sports film and also did not particularly enjoy the acting [83]. *Variety's* critic Todd McCarthy felt that the film was too predictable and the characters were not well developed [84]. Although the film benefited from a good review from the *Los Angeles Times*, the negative reviews from the respected *The New York Times* and *Variety* definitely hurt the film's ability to attract an East Coast audience, art film moviegoers, and frequent moviegoers, who often read these publications.

As a result, the $8 million Spanish and English-language advertising campaign implemented by New Line Cinema was ineffective in attracting an audience, as *Price of Glory* had a poor opening week [81]. The film debuted in March and only generated a box office of about $2 million on 802 screens. The distributor spent over 25% or $2.2 million of its advertising budget on a Spanish-language campaign. Latinos did respond positively to this campaign. *Price of Glory* did well in Latino only areas. For example, in the Southern California communities of Universal City and Chatsworth, *Price of Glory* averaged $12,000 per screen. In contrast, New Line's $6 million dollar mainstream advertising campaign failed to resonate with general audiences as the film only averaged

$601 per screening in less Latino populated areas like Foothill, California [81]. During its second week, New Line Cinema stated it would expand the scope of the campaign by attempting to target teen audiences by running advertisements on MTV, VH1, Nickelodeon, and Nick at Nite [43]. Nevertheless, its weekly box office dropped to little more than $900,000 on over 800 screens during its second week. New Line Cinema quickly reduced the number of prints in circulation to 215 prints in its third week and the film was only in theaters for only one more week. It had a short run of four weeks and only generated a box office of a little over $3 million. *Price of Glory* was a huge box office disappointment for New Line Cinema, since the film cost $10 million to produce and $8 million to promote.

Producer Moctesuma Esparza believes that the lack of an effective marketing campaign for *Price of Glory* created a poor of awareness among mainstream audiences and English-speaking Latinos. Esparza believed that the film's promotional campaign did not have an appropriate amount of English-language advertising. He describes in further detail why New Line Cinema's Spanish-language marketing of *Price of Glory* was ineffective (M. Esparza, personal communication, August 13, 2002).

> There was a decent amount of Spanish-language advertising. This movie unlike *Selena* was aimed at an older audience -- teenage and young adult where *Selena* targeted a family and young audience. As a consequence, the Spanish language advertising was not as effective for *Price of Glory*.

Gabriela

Gabriela focuses on a love story between Mike (Jaime Gomez), a psychiatric hospital worker and Gabriela (Seidy Lopez), an intern therapist [85]. The first obstacle in

distributing the film for Power Point Pictures was the lack of a marketable cast member, who could promote the film. Seidy Lopez had some name recognition among Latino moviegoers due to several supporting roles in U.S. Latino films like *Luminarias*, *Selena*, and *My Family/Mi Familia*. Her only starring role was as "Mousie" in Allison Ander's *Mi Vida Loca* (1993). In contrast, Jaime Gomez had never starred in a feature film. He was probably best known for his role as Evan Cortez in CBS' *Nash Bridges*. But neither actor had been featured in a box office hit.

Without a large marketing budget or marketable stars, the film producers of *Gabriela* had to do a lot of research prior to the release of the film. They studied the box office results of Latino movies and romantic comedies and attempted to place this film in those specific theaters that produced high grosses. For example, Power Point Films made an effort to get a screen in the Norwalk AMC 20, one of the top grossing theaters in America. Producer Vincent Francillon stated why they did not purchase television advertising (personal communication, February 11, 2003).

> If you are a studio, it makes sense to just try to be in as many theaters as possible, because you can buy advertising on television. It makes no sense to buy television advertising, if you are only going to be in two or three theaters. You are going to get great averages [a high box office], but you are not going to get your money back [because television advertising is so expensive]. For a smaller movie [like *Gabriela*], it does not make sense.

Power Point, the distributor of *Gabriela*, utilized a strong word-of-mouth campaign by the Premiere Weekend Club to publicize the motion picture. Vincent Francillon describes the effectiveness of this organization (personal communication, February 11, 2003).

> [The club] was extremely good at getting stories into the newspapers. It got a truckload of stories. It has amazing grassroots marketing [capabilities]. It had people pass out flyers, film posters, postcards, and go to theaters and put up displays. They were extremely effective in getting our story out [to potential audiences].

In addition, the Premiere Weekend Club utilized its vast email listing to reach up to one million potential moviegoers nationwide. Francillon stated that they conducted several mass emails. The Premiere Weekend Club did a university tour all around the country to promote the film.

Prior to releasing *Gabriela*, the distributor produced a lot of trailers. Francillon stated described how Edward Theaters benefited their marketing campaign (personal communication, February 4, 2003).

> The VP of Marketing e-mailed all the theaters and asked them to run our trailer. That is a great way to do advertising. Some of the individual theaters were very helpful. We had bookmarks, postcards, and posters. We designed and placed some very nice displays inside the theaters. They displayed it very prominently and distributed materials about the movie. Theaters themselves, a lot of them, were very nice and some of them not so nice, less cooperative.

Power Point Pictures did mostly English-language advertising. Francillon contended that print advertising was an important tool to convince theaters to run their film. Since *Gabriela* had a low marketing budget, it relied on the support of corporate sponsors like Anheuser Busch in order to purchase national advertisements throughout the film's run. *Gabriela* received a very negative review from *Variety* and a fairly negative review from the *Los Angeles Times*. *Variety's* critic Robert Koehler did not find the story compelling or appreciate the acting skills of the lead characters [85]. Kevin Thomas of *The Los Angeles Times* was not quite as critical. He liked the lead actors, but

felt the story was underdeveloped [86]. On the other hand, the film benefited also from positive reviews from Juan Rodriguez Flores of *La Opinion*, one of the nation's largest Spanish-language newspapers, who wrote two articles about the film, including one story on lead actress Seidy Lopez.

The film's promotional campaign got a boost from receiving the support of the talent who went out on the road to promote it. Both film's director Vincent Miller and lead actor Jaime Gomez aggressively promoted the film throughout Texas. Vincent Francillon also stated that Seidy Lopez and Lupe Ontiveros were helpful. In Los Angeles, autograph signings were conducted at various theaters. Miller did some radio interviews. The talent did a television talk show in Texas, which ran a trailer of the film.

Power Point launched *Gabriela* in Los Angeles in early March. It also ran in several cities in Southern California such as Alhambra, South Gate and Santa Monica. However, *Gabriela's* initial box office figures are unclear, since it did not appear in *Variety*'s box office figures. The distributor claimed that the film produced a box office about $65,000 on 11 screens during its opening week [87]. After *Gabriela's* Los Angeles premiere, Francillon stated that the film was taken "all over the country – market by market. You know, the way it used to be done in the 1970s. We took it from city to city all over Texas, one of our main markets, as well as all over the country" (V. Francillon, personal communication, February 4, 2003). Francillon cited Las Vegas and the Santa Monica Promenade (outside of Los Angeles) as good markets for the film. Power Point took the film to markets as obscure as Moscow, Idaho. A unique characteristic of the distributor's release plan was that it did not plan to circulate the film in New York City

until the fall [87]. Typically, similar independent films like *Gabriela* use positive reviews from New York City critics to launch their films, before expanding to other markets across the United States.

Gabriela's box office figures did not appear in *Variety's* top grossing films until the seventh week of the film's run. According to *Variety*, *Gabriela* reached a high of 30 screens and generated a box office of about $184,000 in its eleventh week. Although *Variety* seemed to contest these box office figures, the distributor reported that the film had a long run of eighteen weeks and produced a box office gross of about $2 million.

Luminarias

Luminarias centers on four professional, single, Latina women: Andrea (Evelina Fernandez), Sofia (Marta Du Bois), Irene (Dyana Ortelli), and Lilly (Angela Moya). Each of these women struggle with a variety of obstacles in order to pursue or maintain their relationships with men [88]. The film did not feature a cast that would have a great deal of name recognition with either Latino moviegoers or mainstream audiences. Evelina Fernandez starred in her first feature film. She had supporting roles in U.S. Latino films like *American Me* and *A Million to Juan*. Dyana Ortelli also had a supporting role in *American Me*. Angela Moya had a supporting role in *The Forbidden Dance* (1990). The most marketable element of the film was that it was based on a successful theatrical play that took place in Los Angeles. Consequently, *Luminarias* would initially have to rely on the fans of the theatrical play to build a positive word of mouth.

Despite not having a notable cast, *Luminarias* was well received at several film festivals, including winning an audience award at the 1999 Chicago Latino Film Festival [89]. The producers had some trouble finding a distributor prior to New Latin Pictures acquiring the motion picture. This distributor had success in marketing Latino niche market films previously. New Latin Pictures promoted *Nueba Yol*, a 1996 box office hit within the Dominican community. The two initial target audiences for *Luminarias* were English-speaking and bilingual Latinas over 25 years old, because these people had some experience with the Chicano community and understood the cultural implications of the comedy depicted in the film (L. Martin, personal communication, April 2, 2003). The next three target audiences were English-speaking and bilingual Latinos and the general female population over the age of 25 (L. Martin, personal communication, April 2, 2003). The distributor initially targeted these core audiences through a California release that focused on the Los Angeles Metro and the San Francisco Bay area (L. Martin, personal communication, April 2, 2003). After the film's California release, New Latin Pictures' planned to utilize a two-prong approach for the rest of the country that focuses predominately on the Latino and the art film communities (L. Martin, personal communication, April 2, 2003).

Chairman Lawrence Martin described *Luminarias*' marketing campaign (personal communication, April 2, 2003).

> We did a combination of traditional advertising and grassroots advertising. Within the grassroots marketing, there was traditional grassroots by word-of-mouth, flyers, and screenings. By non-traditional, we had the actual filmmakers involved in some of the decisions of the grassroots campaign. The reason I say non-traditional, normally, in the case of the studio, they

> would probably take input, but probably script the filmmakers' role versus what I did with *Nueba Yol*. I let them ad-lib.

New Latin Pictures did not target Spanish-speaking Latinos. Besides, being an English-language film, Martin explains why Spanish-speakers were not a core audience for *Luminarias* (personal communication, April 2, 2003).

> They had to have the ability to understand the language. Not to say, that some Spanish-speakers, [who] could not speak English, would not go to the film. We did have some subtitled prints in Latino areas. We felt because of the nature of the film, which is a comedy that [a good] command of the English language would have been necessary for them to accept the film in large numbers.

New Latin Pictures utilized a great deal of radio advertising. New Latin Pictures tried to place spots on radio stations that catered to the bilingual Latinos, for instance, Mega 100 in Los Angeles (L. Martin, personal communication, April 2, 2003). Since they targeted the bilingual market, they did not buy Spanish advertising on either Spanish television or radio. However, the film did receive some coverage in Spanish newspapers and in Spanish television (L. Martin, personal communication, April 2, 2003). The cast was used to sign autographs in theaters. In addition, the cast of the film made a public appearance with women at a Macy store in Los Angeles (L. Martin, personal communication, April 2, 2003). The talent discussed the film and answered questions in front of a live audience (L. Martin, personal communication, April 2, 2003). The filmmakers also did an entertainment talk show in Los Angeles and appearances on activist radio stations like San Francisco's KPFA where the topic was the inequities of Hollywood. Lastly, the distributor received a little free publicity from a short article in *Hispanic* magazine that announced the premiere date of the film.

New Latin Pictures spent about $500,000 on publicity and advertising for *Luminarias* that included posters and trailers (L. Martin, personal communication, April, 2, 2003). It spent several months generating publicity for the film in the Latino community through grassroots marketing. Similar to their previous films, the distributor attempted to bring *Luminarias* to Latino neighborhood theaters. *Luminarias* premiered in Los Angeles theaters during the Cinco de Mayo weekend [90]. *Luminarias* attempted to take advantage of this famous Mexican historical event that is often celebrated by Mexican-Americans throughout the Southwest, a similar strategy implemented by New Line Cinema, which distributed *My Family/Mi Familia* over Cinco de Mayo in 1995.

Luminarias received positive reviews from *The Los Angeles Times* and *Variety*. Kevin Thomas of the *Los Angeles Times* believed that the film gave a unique perspective and it was a solid motion picture overall [88]. *The Los Angeles Times* review was extremely important, since Southern California was one of the distributor's key markets. *Variety's* critic David Rooney found *Luminarias* to be entertaining, warm and funny [91]. On the other hand, *The New York Times* did not review this film, which could have hurt the film's ability to attract art film moviegoers that often read this newspaper.

Luminarias premiered on 55 screens and generated a respectable box office figure of about $144,000 [92]. The film's debut had mixed results in Southern California. For example, it performed well on one screen in Norwalk where it had a per-screen average of $7,000, but it did not perform well in Orange County [92]. According to Lawrence Martin, the film performed well at a Valencia theater. New Latin Pictures got activist groups involved and actually got them to bring people to the film (L. Martin, personal

communication, April 2, 2003). These groups actually bused people to the theater, so they really went to work and put the effort out to go and support the motion picture (L. Martin, personal communication, April 2, 2003). Consequently, the grosses from this theater exceeded all the other venues where the film played. Despite the film's success in Valencia, *Luminarias* did not perform as well as the distributor had hoped throughout the state of California (L. Martin, personal communication, April 2, 2003). As a result, New Latin Pictures had to pare down the scope of its release, because the distributor would lose money if it continued to secure the same number of screens.

In the second week, *Luminarias* was circulated to 47 screens and generated a box office of about $105,000. The film's run ended in most theaters after its second week. As the box office releases were disappointing throughout most of California, New Latin Pictures allowed the local Chicano communities, specifically local film festivals, to conduct their own individual grassroots marketing campaigns for *Luminarias* (L. Martin, personal communication, April 2, 2003). In Pasadena, California, the film generated a great deal of support from the Mexican-American community. *Luminarias* ran for 30 straight weeks in this particular theater, which often runs U.S. Latino films or Spanish-language films (www.newlatin.com, 2000). In Arizona, various investors from Arizona, California, and Texas provided the filmmakers $300,000 to launch the film in five theaters in the Phoenix area [93]. Despite pockets of support, the film only generated a box office of about $430,000. *Luminarias* was a box office disappointment for New Latin Pictures, since the film cost $500,000 to advertise.

New Latin Pictures' *Luminarias* faced stiff competition from early summer films such as *Gladiator* [94]. Lawrence Martin described how effective Universal was in attracting Latinos to this film (personal communication, April 2, 2003).

> *Gladiator* was probably the number-one Latino film of 2000. Universal made a big push for the Latino community. They spent heavy dollars advertising in that community. They had a known quality in Russell Crowe. It was an action picture. They choose that film. If you look at the grosses for that weekend, you will see that every other film was buried by *Gladiator*. *Gladiator* opened with huge numbers and everyone else suffered.

In retrospect, Lawrence Martin attempted to figure out why *Luminarias* did not resonate with U.S. Latinos. Without placing blame or faulting the filmmakers, he felt that their involvement in the marketing campaign backfired on them, because the message became muddled (personal communication, April 2, 2003).

> We tried our hardest to portray this as a romantic comedy with the under lining theme being the Latino experience. However, the personal appearances and interviews inevitability turned into Chicano angst pride situation. Questions were no longer about the film, but how you feel about Latinos inability to break into Hollywood. How does your film break the mold?

Martin concluded that the Latino activism message reflected by some of the film's characters did not coincide with what the Latino movie going community enjoys. To be specific, some of the film's characters had some strong pro-Chicano comments from the civil rights movement of the 1960s. These characters also had some sarcastic remarks about Anglo men that were meant to be humorous to Latino moviegoers. However, Martin believes that the Latino community no longer reacts well to these "jaded angst" messages (e.g. the white man owes us, our land was stolen, or they are the oppressors)

that were conveyed throughout this film (personal communication, April 2, 2003). Furthermore, Martin believed the primary target audience of the film, older Latinas, was a difficult audience to attract to a film, because they are busy raising their families.

Spy Kids

Spy Kids is about the Cortez family, who seemingly live a quiet life in the suburbs. However, in reality, the parents of this household, Gregorio (Antonio Banderas) and his wife Ingrid (Carla Gugino), are secret agents [95]. Despite their expertise and experience, the parents are imprisoned in Fegan Floop's (Alan Cumming) castle and must depend on their children Carmen (Alexa Vega) and Juni (Daryl Sabara) in order to save them. *Spy Kids* had a marketable star Antonio Banderas and director Robert Rodriguez. Banderas successfully crossed over from Spanish films to mainstream Hollywood films. Prior to *Spy Kids*, he co-starred in *The Mask of Zorro* (1998) and *Evita* (1996). Rodriguez was also well known to mainstream audiences. He had directed horror and action films like *The Faculty* (1998), *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996), and *Desperado*.

Dimension Films, which is owned by Disney, implemented two different types of marketing strategies for Latino and mainstream audiences. Producer Elizabeth Avellan describes how the distributor promoted the film to both of these audiences (personal communication, September 16, 2003).

> They made sure that when they promoted it on the Latino channels that they did promote the film as a movie with a lot of Latino characters. It was a family film about Carmen Cortez and the Cortez family. They really banked on that for that Spanish-speaking audience actually. For the American audiences, they did not have to. It was a kids movie. It was a family film. When they went after the Latino market specifically, they did

> (promote it as a Latino film). We had so many names that could be Latino.

Dimension Films also developed promotional partnerships with a wide variety of companies that targeted children. It initially developed an advertising campaign with Minute Maid. Minute Maid's venture with a film company was its first effort in over a decade [96]. Minute Maid promoted *Spy Kids* on its Hi-C packages and provided displays [96]. It also publicized a grand prize Hollywood trip on its juice boxes [97]. Lastly, Minute Maid added a 10-second tag to its television advertisements [96].

Dimension Films expanded the film's visibility by promoting it on children's lunchboxes, toys and shoes [97]. Frito-Lay advertised the film on its Cheetos and Funyuns snack bags [97]. Sorrento placed *Spy Kids* stickers on two million cheese snack items and collaborated in the promotion of an activity book that offers free *Spy Kids* stuff [97]. Payless ShoeSource offered a free movie poster with any shoe purchase [97]. In addition, it became the exclusive seller of *Spy Kids* shoes, sunglasses, and kids' backpacks [97]. Finally, Dimension promoted *Spy Kids* through Tooned –In, which circulates an estimated 4 million school menus to parents in 350 school districts [97].

Expanding beyond snacks and clothing, Dimension Films also developed promotional tie-ins with Radio Shack. The electronic store began to sell a radio controlled *Spy Kids* car [97]. Trendmaster, another toy maker, branded five *Spy Kids* products [97]. It also targeted parents through Isuzu. Through an in-theater sweepstakes, Isuzu offered the Axiom SUV, which is featured in the film, as a prize [97]. Isuzu spent more than $1 million in supporting the motion picture through product placement,

sweepstakes, licensing, and other events [98]. S.C. Johnson utilized its house cleaning products to develop a sweepstakes that centered around the motion picture [97].

McDonald's became a huge financial supporter of *Spy Kids* and launched a $15 million promotional tie-in campaign [99]. Part of this invaluable cross-promotion included McDonald's Happy Meals, which are still extremely popular with young children throughout the country. McDonald's, in conjunction with Isuzu, offered mini versions of the Spy Kids Axiom in its Happy Meals [98]. In an accompanying sweepstakes prize, each Happy Meal was provided with a code number [98]. McDonald's customers had an opportunity to go to the McDonald's website and enter their Happy Meal code number to see if they won a real Axiom [98]. The Spy Kids Axiom was displayed prominently on restaurant trays and within McDonald's restaurants [98].

Producer Elizabeth Avellan believes that *Spy Kids* was the first U.S. Latino film to be promoted by McDonalds. She states how *Spy Kids* benefited from its promotional tie-ins with this fast food chain (personal communication, September 16, 2003).

> With *Spy Kids*, what really helped gain ground I think was that we got a McDonald's deal, because they put so much money into publicity, marketing and creating toys. Robert forged an amazing relationship with them, because he had actually designed most of the toys for them already. He drew stuff for them. He had everything pretty much ready when they came and that is usually not the case. They were so interested in his creativity and what the movie was about that McDonalds signed on. It was a very successful campaign for both. I think that was a nice big push for *Spy Kids*, because then you go to McDonalds and see *Spy Kids*.

Beyond *Spy Kids*' important partnership with McDonalds, Dimension Films really pushed the motion picture with a great deal of publicity. Dimension promoted the film

heavily on Latino-oriented and Spanish-language media outlets. Director Robert Rodriguez did an interview with *Hispanic* magazine. During this interview, he stated how he wanted to produce a film with many positive Latino characters. *Spy Kids*' advertisements were placed on both Univision and Telemundo (E. Avellan, personal communication, September 16, 2003). Dimension made sure that *Spy Kids'* commercials were strategically placed when parents could be watching television with their kids (E. Avellan, personal communication, September 16, 2003). In addition, Avellan stated that the distributor made specific *Spy Kids* trailers for the Latino market, featuring Latino faces and Latino names -- Alexis Vega, Cheetch Marin, and Antonio Banderas -- and with the right accents. She believed that these trailers were effective in attracting more Latinos.

Spy Kids received additional visibility from various media outlets ranging from mainstream print, cable, to radio. After receiving a positive review from *The New York Times*, this newspaper did a follow-up story on Robert Rodriguez. The film also received positive reviews from the *Los Angeles Times* and *Variety*. Each of these reviewers highlighted the fact this motion picture was a good film for kids to watch. Alexa Vega and Daryl Sabara, the two child stars, were featured in *Time for Kids*. *National Geographic World* discussed the contraptions that were used in *Spy Kids*. The Discovery Channel's weekend program Discovery Kids marketed the film through its cable channel that included a one-week trip to a Discovery Camp in the Bahamas for a family of four as a grand prize [97]. Kids could register at Discovery's 160 stores located throughout the country [97]. Nickelodeon advertised *Spy Kids* through its three and half-hour "Snoop-

a-thon" that utilized its cartoon characters by posing them as spies [97]. The Disney Channel provided the film some synergy through sneak previews in theaters throughout the countries' top 35 markets [97]. Disney's radio stations aired 60-second spots that advertised both Isuzu and the film through an in-theater car giveaway [97]. *The Rosie O'Donnell Show* focused its entire one-hour program on *Spy Kids* [100]. The film prospered from a great deal of publicity that centered on the two kids.

Spy Kids premiered in the Hyperion Theater at Disney's California Adventure [101]. The buzz created by these various cross-promotions and the media was so tremendous that Disney officials had to turn people away at the screening [101]. More importantly, the promotional tie-ins also enabled Dimension Films to keep their marketing costs in check, since these various corporations shared the marketing costs. During its opening week in March, *Spy Kids* debuted on over 3100 screens and generated a box office of over $31 million. This motion picture eventually reached a high of nearly 3200 screens on its fourth week. It was the number-one film in the United States for three consecutive weeks [102]. *Spy Kids'* first theatrical run in March lasted about 11 weeks and earn about $100 million at the box office. Dimension Films re-released *Spy Kids* with additional scenes in the late summer. The new and improved version of *Spy Kids* debuted on nearly 1700 screens in August and earned almost $2.5 million. Its re-release run lasted for 7 weeks and earned an additional box office of over $5 million. The film ultimately earned about $112 million, which makes it the most successful U.S. Latino motion picture in the history of the U.S. film industry. *Spy Kids* also earned Dimension a profit, since the film only cost $35 million to produce.

The film's combination of action along with its family fare was a hit with Latino audiences. Latino moviegoers were attracted to *Spy Kid's* original representation of their ethnic group [103]. According to Gabriel Reyes, President of Reyes Entertainment, whose company markets films to the Latino market, stated, "Latinos were very proud of the fact that the family in *Spy Kids* was Latino" [103]. Reyes also cited that the characters' similar ethnicity scored points with Latinos [103]. According to Elizabeth Avellan, little girls were also attracted to the heroine in the film, Carmen Cortez. Lastly, Miramax's Los Angeles president Mark Gill pointed out that 19% of the moviegoers for *Spy Kids* were Latinos, which at the time only made up 12% of the nation's population [103].

Avellan believed that the universal nature of the characters and the film's theme made *Spy Kids,* a box office success. Next, she credits McDonalds for its help in launching the film. Lastly, she believes that the Weinstein Brothers' philosophy to focus heavily on publicity instead of marketing helped *Spy Kids* immensely (E. Avellan, personal communication, September 16, 2003).

> They spend a lot of time on publicity, because publicity is free. Bob Weinstein and Harvey Weinstein -- one thing that they have really excelled at is the publicity aspect of things, because they do not have to spend a lot of money on marketing something when you can get publicity for free. We got a lot of hits on Latin newspapers and on Spanish-speaking shows. They invite a lot of people to the press junkets that are Latinos, even the ones that do not necessarily have a Latino slant. They give them the respect and they receive the rewards of having access to actors from Miramax films not just our films. I think other studios have followed suit. Miramax really does not spend the kind of money that Sony spends on marketing -- plastering walls with ads and ads in magazines. Harvey and Bob never spent money on ads in magazines. They would rather have article in a magazine about the movie or about the actor that

mentions the film. That is the kind of stuff they do! It is a different way of doing it.

Summary of Key Events of the Late 1990s - 2001

By the later stages of the 1990s, U.S. Latinos had become an important niche market for mainstream marketers, as it grew to over 30 million people. Marketers were attracted to the Latino market for two primary reasons. First, this ethnic group tended to be younger than the average American. Next, the purchasing power of Latinos was escalating and would most likely continue to skyrocket, as they begin to mature and acquire better jobs. In order to better target and develop brand loyalty from these consumers, mainstream marketers invested more money into Spanish-language advertising. Simultaneously, the number of Spanish-language media outlets began to expand. Some Spanish-language magazines like *People En Espanol* experienced a great deal of success, as its subscriber base skyrocketed. Even the Internet exhibited promise as an advertising vehicle to target Latinos as home computer usage among this ethnic group increased by more than 65%.

While Spanish-language media outlets became prominent advertising vehicles for mainstream advertisers, Univision and Telemundo continued to attract the majority of advertising revenue from mainstream marketers. Despite being the most successful Spanish-language network, Univision did not get complacent. The network purposed to develop additional revenue streams by launching a new network that would be a direct competitor to the older parent affiliate, but could attract additional viewers from Telemundo or English-language networks. On the other hand, Telemundo was going

through a number of changes, especially after Sony acquired Telemundo in 1997. Since the Sony takeover, the networks ratings have begun to improve. By 2000, Telemundo was also doing excellent business with mainstream marketers. For example, in 2000, an extraordinary 33% of its advertisers were new clients.

Within the motion picture industry, U.S. Latino films were not lucrative endeavors for Hollywood studio distributors. Consequently, Hollywood studios ceased trying to promote and circulate Latino crossover hits in 1997. *Selena* was the last U.S. Latino film in the studio distribution pipeline. Studio distributors also stopped trying to circulate English and Spanish-language prints simultaneously after *Fools Rush In*. Studio film marketers simply could not develop an effective demographic profile on Latino movie going habits, beyond the fact that Latinos go to the movies more than the general population. At the same time, film marketers continued to struggle in producing and acquiring U.S. Latino films that resonated with both Latino and general audiences. By the end of this period, only specialty divisions of studios or independent distributors circulated U.S. Latino films.

During the late 1990s, more studios began to gravitate to more hybrid U.S. Latino films like *Fools Rush In* and *Crazy/Beautiful*. These films attempted to attract both a Latino and general audience and featured a mainstream television or film star, such as Matthew Perry or Kristen Dunst, to attract a general audience. These mainstream stars were cast as romantic leads along with less marketable Latino stars like Salma Hayek and Jay Hernandez. Despite the fact that distributors debuted each of these films on over 1,600 screens, this formula was not very successful. This casting strategy of hiring an

Anglo and a Latino actor in an intercultural relationship exhibited a general reluctance by Hollywood studios to hire two Latino leads for a single film. These casting decisions also suggest that studio marketers still did not have a great deal of faith in their ability to attract a mainstream audience to a film that featured two Latino actors. Instead, they opted for a safer strategy of casting a fairly well known Anglo actor in order to carry these films.

Nevertheless, Jennifer Lopez and Antonio Banderas did emerge as crossover Latino stars by the end of this period. *Selena* highlighted Lopez's talent as well as her potential marketability. Since this breakthrough performance, her career has really taken off. She has starred or co-starred in several Hollywood and art films like *Anaconda*, *Out of Sight* (1998), and *The Wedding Planner* (2001). While Lopez was fast becoming a superstar, she has not appeared in a U.S. Latino film since *Selena*. As a result, a Latino cast film has not been able to take advantage of her star power. On the other hand, Banderas was involved initially in several films that were not highly successful like *The Mambo Kings* and *The Assassins*. However, after his success with *Evita* and *Mask of Zorro*, he had become a fairly marketable mainstream star. Furthermore, he had become a featured star in several of U.S. Latino films like *Desperado* and the *Spy Kids* trilogy.

Lopez and other Latino actors were able to get roles in multi-ethnic films like *Anaconda*, *Traffic*, and *The Fast and The Furious* as studios attempted to circulate films that appealed to Latino and non-Latino audiences in the United States as well as global audiences throughout the world. Hollywood distributors were no longer interested in attracting a single audience to motion pictures like U.S. Latino films. Instead, studios

sought to acquire and promote films that would most likely exceed box-office figures of $100 million in both North American and foreign markets in order to ensure a long and profitable run in ancillary markets. In order to increase their chances for theatrical and ancillary market success, the studio films of this period implemented multi-million dollar promotional campaigns that inundated the public with multiple advertisements through several types of mediums in order to remain visible. In order to justify multi-million dollar promotional campaigns, these films were often released on over 3,000 screens in the United States. The scope of these campaigns overwhelmed the majority of independent U.S. Latino films like *Luminarias* that competed directly with *Gladiator*.

Despite the fact that the marketplace was extremely competitive for foreign-language films, Spanish-language art films like *Y Tu Mama Tambien* were quite successful with art film moviegoers and Spanish-speaking Latinos. Sony Pictures Classic was the distributor that took advantage of this underserved portion of the movie-going audience by circulating *Todo Sobre Mi Madre*, *Central Station*, and *Tango*. The Mexican film industry also began to experience a renaissance with both Mexican and American audiences. The box-office success of both *La Otra Conquista* and *Sexo, Pudor, y Lagrimas* in Mexico were the motion pictures that illustrated to Mexican investors that a Mexican film could be a profitable venture. Mexico subsequently released *Amores Perros*, which attracted both U.S. Latino and art film audiences. With more Mexican theaters, additional domestic production, and the end of unofficial government censorship, this once-proud film industry appears to be regaining its prominence among Mexican, U.S. Latinos and art film audiences.

The renaissance of the Mexican and other Latin American film industries as well as the lack of Spanish-language films being circulated U.S. distributors were essential factors in the development of four U.S.-based distributors that targeted Spanish-speaking Latinos. Two of these distributors, Latin Universe and Hombre D'Oro, only promoted one film each. Both *Santitos* (Latin Universe) and *La Otra Conquista* (Hombre D'Oro) did not produce significant box-office figures. Latin Universe committed some marketing and strategic errors such as not promoting their films in the mainstream media and not securing art film screens. On the other hand, Hombre D'Oro saturated the Southern California theaters with *La Otra Conquista*. This distributor regionally circulated this film and did fairly modest business for a couple of weeks. The Arenas Group appears to be the distributor with the most promising future. Santiago Pozo, one of the leading marketing experts within the Spanish-language market, manages the company. In addition, the company received monetary backing from Universal and Marco Polo Investment, a Spanish-investment firm. New Latin Pictures was the most successful independent Latino film distributor. It effectively circulated the *Nueba Yol* series on the East Coast in areas with a high number of Dominicans, who were the target audience for this film. This distributor was not only able to secure mainstream theaters, but also secured screens near Latino communities. This distribution strategy was extremely effective in New York City. However, the Nueba Yol films did not produce a significant box-office return in the West Coast cities like Los Angeles, where the majority of moviegoers are Mexican-American.

New Latin Pictures encountered problems that Hollywood studios traditionally encountered when it comes to attracting a broader Latino audience to its films. This distributor discovered that while Latinos share a similar language, each individual ethnic group has a great deal of pride in its cultural products like music and film, which sometimes borders on antagonism between various Latino groups. Consequently, many potential Puerto Rican or Cuban moviegoers typically will not support Mexican films. Simultaneously, Mexicans audiences generally will not support a Cuban or Puerto Rican film. This lack of unity among the larger Latino groups has resulted in multiple niche audiences that have not been consolidated into a significant, unified movie-going audience. Perhaps more importantly, this audience has not displayed the financial muscle to U.S. producers and studios that it will support U.S. Latino films on a consistent basis. This dilemma will have to be overcome by Latino-oriented distributors, if they wish to successfully cultivate this niche market.

The highly competitive movie marketplace and the lack of significant marketing campaigns appeared to have hurt many U.S. Latino films of the late 1990s. Similar to many independent motion pictures, several U.S. Latino films released failed to secure enough screens to produce box-office revenues over $1 million dollars. For instance, *The Disappearance of Garcia Lorca, Star Maps, Knockout, Bread and Roses, Pinero,* and *King of the Jungle*, debuted and quickly disappeared from theaters. These films failed to attract either a Latino or non-Latino audience and had sub par box office figures. The highly acclaimed *Girlfight* was slightly more successful, although it ultimately failed to attract a widespread female, urban, or art film audience. Despite securing over 200

screens over a four-week period, *Girlfight* generated a box office of less than $2 million. On the other hand, a few U.S. Latino art films like *Before Night Falls*, *Woman on Top*, and *Tortilla Soup* managed to earn between $4 - $5 million by securing a minimum of 100 screens for at least three weeks.

Many U.S. Latino films of this era were also hurt by the lack of theaters in Latino communities or neighborhoods. Hollywood exhibitors and the Latino community's financial leaders have been slow to address this problem. Unlike Magic Johnson, who has built numerous theaters in Black neighborhoods of major cities, a wealthy Latino individual has not been willing to invest money in building theaters in these areas. There seems to be a person who may resolve this problem. Currently, Montesuma Esparza's Mayan Theaters are being built in a few heavily populated Latino cities. These theaters will provide one or two screens to a U.S. Latino or Spanish-language film. In spite of this new venue for U.S. Latino films, the lack of movie theaters in Latino areas remains a huge obstacle for these motion pictures into the 21st century.

On the other hand, U.S. Latino films could benefit from Latino movie going clubs like The Premiere Weekend Club that emerged in the late 1990s. This organization can be a potentially valuable marketing tool for U.S. Latino films. The company promoted itself as an entity designed to assist distributors in getting a large number of Latino moviegoers to theaters and to support their Latino film projects. The organization contends that if Latino audiences support U.S. Latino films then the studios will produce more films, since these projects are potentially profitable. The Weekend Club takes advantage of the growing number of Latino households that have personal computers.

This marketing company notifies its huge membership of subscribers that a Latino project is about to debut by sending out mass emails. Within these emails, The Weekend Club briefly describes the film and reminds its members the importance of supporting a Latino film during its opening week.

U.S. Latino films also benefited from articles written by a *Los Angeles Times* journalist Lorenza Munoz. She provided both U.S. Latino films and distributors with much needed visibility and free publicity. Her articles were often critical of how various distributors marketed U.S. Latino films, which typically had not attracted much attention from newspaper entertainment journalists. For instance, she critiqued New Line Cinema's marketing strategy regarding *Price of Glory*. In addition, she was critical of Latin Universe's handling of *Santitos*. Her article on Screen Gem's *Girlfight* tried to explain why the film failed at the box office. More importantly, Munoz's articles illustrated the vital role that marketing plays in the ultimate success of a motion picture.

In spite of a growing population and more visibility for U.S. Latino films, *Selena* was the last U.S. Latino film to be promoted by a studio. In this particular case, Warner Bros. implemented a bilingual marketing campaign. The studio was confident that this film would crossover to a mainstream audience and perhaps even exceed the box office total of *La Bamba*. *Selena* performed well during the initial weeks of a its run, as a large number of Latinos sought out the film. The marketing campaign successfully targeted Latino audiences, but failed to cross over to general audiences. The lack of a crossover audience did not allow the film to sustain a long theatrical run outside of a few Latino markets. *Selena* earned a modest $35 million dollars.

New Line Cinema's second venture with a U.S. Latino film was not nearly as successfully. *Price of Glory* ran into a series of problems that undermined its potential box-office. First, the film's producers did not sign a well-known crossover act for its soundtrack. A hot single from a popular singer could have been an effective marketing tool for *Price of Glory* and provided a great deal of free publicity for the motion picture. The distributor also invested too much money on Spanish-language advertising for a film that probably would have been better served to target older, English-speaking Latinos and perhaps sports fans. New Line Cinema had an opportunity to target sports fans when Jimmy Smits was named to host ESPN's ESPY Awards. However, the distributor decided not to fully hype his appearance on the program and only promoted the motion picture regionally. Lastly, the film's grassroots campaign did not generate a great deal of buzz in the Latino community, because they only implemented a three-week campaign. Consequently, *Price of Glory* did not attract a large audience, as it earned a disappointing $3 million.

Gabriela was a fairly successful independent film that had a very limited marketing budget. Power Point Films did a great deal of research prior to circulating *Gabriela* in order to select key theaters. The motion picture utilized its stars to promote the motion picture in heavily populated Latino states like Texas. In addition, the Premiere Weekend Club used its large database to notify Latino moviegoers that *Gabriela*, a motion picture with a Latino cast, was premiering soon. The organization's Internet marketing campaign took advantage of a growing number of Latinos who own household computers. *Gabriela* ultimately earned about $2 million dollars.

New Latin Pictures also used a regional marketing campaign for *Luminarias*, initially targeting the fans of the play and Latina women over 25. The distributor focused primarily on California cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles. However, the film never attracted many Latina moviegoers in these cities. *Luminarias* encountered two principal problems. First, *Luminarias* was unable to gain any visibility against *Gladiator's* multi-million dollar promotional campaign. Next, they targeted a difficult audience, because many Latinas over the age of 25 are busy raising a family. The motion picture was a box office disappointment for New Latin Pictures.

After several failed attempts by Disney to produce a U.S. Latino hit, its subsidiary, Dimension Films, successfully promoted and circulated *Spy Kids*, which surpassed the $100 million mark. Despite the fact that this motion picture featured a predominately Latino cast, the distributor avoided the Latino label, perhaps because the marketers did not want to limit the film's audience by placing an ethnic label on the motion picture. Dimension Films simply promoted and distributed a film about a Latino family that appealed to American kids regardless of ethnic groups. Dimension's target audience attracted a number of fast-food chains, which eagerly utilized various marketing tie-ins in order to advertise their products within film scenes or produce a series of merchandising opportunities that were affiliated with the motion picture. The overall marketing campaign encompassed fast food restaurants, toy makers, and an automobile dealer to create a significant "buzz" with children and parents. *Spy Kids*' various promotional tie-ins were vital elements in launching a film that eventually became one of

the surprise hits of 2001. *Spy Kids* provides an example of what is possible when quality filmmaking is integrated with an effective marketing campaign.

By the end of this decade, this market was so large that a couple of the signature U.S. Latino films of this period were attractive promotional tie-in vehicles for mainstream companies. *Selena* became one of the first U.S. Latino films, since *La Bamba*, to generate a great deal of promotional support from general market companies. For instance, Banc One placed a product advertisement in the motion picture. But *Selena* would also be the last studio film of this period, as studios increasingly began to target international markets instead of domestic markets. The U.S. Latino film that benefited most from the promotional tie-in trend was *Spy Kids*. This motion picture garnered widespread support from companies like Minute Maid and Frito-Lay. *Spy Kids* probably profited most when Isuzu and McDonald's collaborated in placing a mini-version of the Axiom in Happy Meals, which attracted a large number of children to the film. As studios stopped directly distributing U.S. Latino films, studio affiliated specialty divisions like Fox Searchlight or fairly large art film distributors such as Lion's Gate were acquiring and circulating a growing number of U.S. Latino films. These motion pictures like *Star Maps, Before Night Falls,* or *Girlfight* were often promoted simply as an art film instead of a Latino film. Art film marketers of this period increasingly appeared to remove ethnic labels in order to appeal art film moviegoers. Lastly, similar to the previous three periods, independent distributors of U.S. Latino films continued to struggle at the box office, as they did not possess either the marketing budgets to buy

visibility or the ability to secure a high number of screens in order to produce significant box offices figures.

Key Marketing Strategies (1996-2001)

Film Title	Date of Release	Distributor	Grassroots Marketing	Critics	Promo. Tie-Ins	Interviews	Media	Spanish Ad Campaign	Spanish/ Subtitled	Avoided Latino Label	Soundtrack/ Song	# of Screens (premiere) (broadest)	Box Office Gross	Theatrical Run
Fools Rush In	Feb-97	Sony Pictures					X		X			1650 screens/ 1650 screens	$29.2m	16 weeks
Selena	Mar-97	Warner Bros.	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	1850 screens/ 1870 screens	35.4m	13 weeks
Star Maps	Jul-97	Fox Searchlight Pictures		X						X		5 screens/ 40 screens	$592,573	7 weeks
The Disappearance of Garcia Lorca	Sep-97	Triumph Films										30 screens/ 30 screens	$272,150	3 weeks
Latin Boys Go to Hell	Sep-97	Strand Releasing										2 screens/ 2 screens*	$199,033	3 weeks*
Knockout	Feb-00	Renegade Entertainment									X	110 screens/ 110 screens	$169,503	2 weeks*
Price of Glory	Mar-00	New Line Cinema	X			X	X	X			X	802 screen/ 802 screens	$3.4m	4 weeks
Luminarias	May-00	New Latin Pictures	X	X		X	X					55 screens/ 55 screens	$428,535	30 weeks^
Girlfight	Sep-00	Screen Gems Inc.	X	X		X	X	X			X	28 screens/ 250 screens	$1.7m	4 weeks
Woman on Top	Sep-00	Fox Searchlight Pictures					X					1100 screens/ 1100 screens	$5.0m	5 weeks
Before Night Falls	Dec-00	Fine Line	X	X						X		8 screens/ 127 screens	$4.2m	17 weeks
Gabriela	Mar-01	Power Points Films	X	X		X						11 screens/ 30 screens	$2.3m	18 weeks
Bread and Roses	May-01	Lions Gate Films	X				X					34 screens/ 39 screens	$525,738	7 weeks
Our Song	May-01	IFC								X		1 screen/ 12 screens	$254,199	18 weeks

Key Marketing Strategies (1996-2001)

Crazy/Beautiful	Jun-01	Buena Vista				X				X	1600 screens/ 1600 screens	$16.2m	9 weeks
Tortilla Soup	Aug-01	Samuel Goldwyn	X			X					200 screens/ 220 screens	$4.4m	12 weeks
King of the Jungle	Nov-01	UrbanWorld Films									1 screen / 4 screens	$27,000	2 weeks
Pinero	Dec-01	Miramax						X			2 screens/ 21screens	$302,325	4 weeks
Spy Kids	Mar-2001 & Aug-2001	Dimension Films		X	X	X	X	X			3104 screens/ 3197 screens	$112.6m	18 weeks

* = information is unclear.
^ = ran at one theater for 30 weeks

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CHAPTER 7: U.S. LATINO FILMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

After decades of unfulfilled box office figures for many U.S. Latino films, the box office success of *Spy Kids* (2001) and higher quality films being produced in Spain and Mexico like *Todo Sobre Mi Madre* (*All About My Mother*) (1999) have created a tremendous amount of positive momentum for Spanish-speaking and U.S. Latino films in the early portions of the 21st Century. For instance, several Latin American, Spanish, and U.S. Latino motion pictures were honored at the 2003 Oscars. In addition, filmmaker Robert Rodriguez maintained his phenomenal box office run that began with *El Mariachi* with three more U.S. Latino films – *Spy Kids 2* (2002), *Spy Kids 3-D* (2003), and *Once Upon Time in Mexico* (2003) -- that continue to resonate with diverse audiences. As more high quality, U.S. Latino and Latin American films is being produced, several U.S. distributors like IFC have been able to successfully promote these motion pictures. The development of more quality product for the regions above and a growing population is enabling Arenas Entertainment, an emerging Latino distributor, to expand its current marketing operation into a distribution component with hopes that its can attract a growing number of Latino moviegoers to its motion pictures. Arenas Entertainment hopes to compete with these specialty distributors for these films, which have recently become more prestigious and lucrative. In this chapter, I briefly summarize the U.S. Latino market of this era. I also provide a quick overview of how various Spanish-language and U.S. Latino films were promoted and distributed. Lastly, I will concisely

review the significant events, films, and filmmakers that have affected the U.S. Latino community in the early part of the 21st century.

Early 21st Century Marketplace

Distributors of U.S. Latino films will have a growing target audience with skyrocketing purchasing strength over the first two decades of the 21st century. Latino buying power was $630 million in 2002 and projected to reach nearly $685 billion a year in 2003, surpassing the buying power of African Americans for the first time [1, 2]. By the end of this decade, Latino purchasing power is expected to reach $900 million [3]. By 2020, Latino buying power is projected to triple and reach $2.5 trillion [4]. The median age of this ethnic group will also continue to be younger than mainstream Americans for the foreseeable future. For instance, within five years, 25% of Americans under the age of 25 will be Latinos [5]. The census bureau projects that there will be 49 million Latinos by 2010 [6]. Simultaneously, the United States will have more 13 year-olds in 2010 since 1970 and a significant part of that population will be Latinos [7]. By 2020, Global Insight estimates that there will be 63 million U.S. Latinos [8]. Consequently, if distributors of U.S. Latino films can market and distribute motion pictures effectively to this ethnic group, they will be able to take benefit from a younger demographic that spent an estimated $3.2 billion on entertainment in 2003 [9]. Considering the age of many Latinos and the population projections, entertainment spending is likely to increase as more Latinos acculturate themselves into the mainstream and earn more money.

A growing number of bilingual Latinos are under the age of 35. This group of Latinos is becoming an extremely influential group to marketers. This segment of Latino are now referred to by marketers as Generation N (typically Latinos born between 1965-1980) [10, p. 142]. Bill Teck, a Cuban American, coined this label, because he did not believe that Latinos fit the "Generation X rubric" [11]. Similar to previous generations of U.S. Latinos, this group is acculturating itself rapidly into the mainstream. However in contrast to previous generations, this Latino segment is also increasingly influencing mainstream society [10, p. 142]. They are helping to introduce more Latino actors and musicians into the mainstream, because this large group of Latinos tends be younger than the mainstream. Their influence on U.S. mainstream culture will likely continue to be felt for many years to come.

U.S. Latinos generally tend to be heavy consumers of mass media and spend a great deal of money on entertainment. They watch television at much higher rates than the mainstream. According to a 1998 study conducted by the Tomas Rivera Institute, 64% of Latinos watched at least four hours of television per day [12]. Latinos also have a propensity to listen to the radio more than the mainstream. Furthermore, Latinos have a tendency to be an extremely heavy movie going audience. They go to nearly 10 films per year [13]. However, they are more likely to rent a movie on video or DVD. According to Julio Noriega of Venevision International, Latinos rent 19.3 tapes and 15.5 DVDs per year. Similar to the general market, they also purchase DVDs and tapes at large retail stores like Wal-Mart (Judith McCourt, personal communication, March 9, 2004). At the same time, they are more likely to buy DVDs and videos at the local video store, such as

Blockbuster, and electronic outlets like Tower Records that have aggressively targeted Latinos [14]. In terms of renting a DVD, they are likely to rent a video at Blockbuster (Judith McCourt, personal communication, March 9, 2004). The estimated total spent by U.S. Latinos on video sell-through and rental is estimated to be about $450 million [9].

Although distributors of this era are doing a better job of marketing U.S. Latino films to this growing audience, these motion pictures may even surpass current box office figures, if they spent more money on Spanish-language advertising. A consistent problem that hampers many U.S. Latino films is that many distributors typically do not invested enough money on Spanish-language advertising, which is a direct vehicle to one of the motion picture's target audience. Mainstream companies spent only $959 million in just the first half of 2002 on Spanish-language television advertising. While these figures are improving, the Association of Hispanic Advertising Agencies (AHAA) contends that these organizations still do not spend enough money on the Latino market to fully realize its potential [15]. The AHAA argues that this long trend of under spending on this niche market was not changing despite the fact Latino purchasing power was skyrocketing [15]. According to the AHAA, many of the leading advertisers allocated only a little more than 3% of its total advertising dollars on Latino marketing [15]. AHAA maintains that these companies should make financial arrangements that allocate between 7% and 8% of their marketing budgets on this market [15]. The AHAA identified entertainment companies as "laggards" for not allotting enough funds to Spanish-language advertising [15]. As a result, studios are evidently losing theatrical box

office and ancillary revenue from this niche market, because they refuse to invest more funds into Spanish-language advertising.

While the lack of Spanish-language advertising by film companies remains problematic, the marketers of U.S. Latino films also do not have many viable marketing outlets that directly target this ethnic group on English-language television networks. For example, Latino talent and programs continue to be significantly underrepresented on English-language television networks. According to a UCLA study, Latinos made up only 3% of major and minor primetime characters in the Fall 2002 television season [16]. Unfortunately, this low figure was improvement from 2001, where it was only 2% [16]. Nearly half of the Latino characters that appeared on primetime were on ABC's *George Lopez Show* and the recently cancelled *Greetings from Tucson* on the WB [17]. CBS had an opportunity to improve these dismal figures by including *American Family* into its fall line-up. However, the network elected not to place the Latino drama within its 2000-2001 programming [18]. The other networks also did not pickup the television program [18]. PBS saved the program from becoming just another unseen television pilot and eventually acquired *American Family* [18]. The lack of Latinos on primetime television is puzzling when we consider that 84% of the new television viewers between 2002-2003 will be Latinos, which contradicts the notion that Latinos simply watch Spanish-language television [19]. The lack of Latino talent on network television makes it extremely difficult for a marketer of a U.S. Latino film to buy advertising time on these networks, outside *The George Lopez Show*, that attract a significant Latino audience.

Some television networks like Fox are attempting to alleviate this problem by developing more programming that targets English-language and Spanish-language Latinos. Fox was scheduled to add two Latino programs to its Fall 2003 lineup, *Luis* staring Luis Guzman and *The Ortegas* featuring Cheech Marin and Al Madrigal [16]. *Luis* is about a Puerto Rican business owner, who lives in New York [20]. Fox only televised a couple episodes of this sitcom before it was cancelled. *The Ortegas* centers on a Mexican-American family living in Southern California [20]. This program is still in production. Fox had hoped to attract a large Latino audience to these two programs [20]. The sole highlight of Latino talent on network television was the *George Lopez Show*, which entered its second season in 2003, and continued to be the only network television program about a Latino family [16]. This comedy has been one of the few Latino television programs to be renewed by a U.S. television network. *Kingpin*, a hour-long drama about a Latino drug lord, earned high ratings, but stirred controversy within the Latino community for its stereotypical portrayal of this ethnic group [2]. Although its initial telecasts won their time slots among the important 18-49 viewers, NBC did not renew the drama [2]. On cable, Disney is also attempting to target more Spanish-speaking and bilingual male viewers with a Spanish-language version of ESPN [3]. Disney hopes to attract more these male viewers, who are often ignored by Spanish-speaking networks that traditionally air telenovelas aimed at female viewers. Nickelodeon continued to be one of bright spots on cable television with its popular preschool cartoon *Dora the Explorer* and *The Brothers Garcia*, a family sitcom [2].

These two are excellent programs for advertisers that are attempting to target young Latinos.

Although English-language networks have done a dreadful job of including more Latino talent within their network line-ups, they have been acquiring Spanish-language media outlets that have direct access to millions of Latino viewers. For instance, the FCC officially approved NBC's purchasing of 13 full-power, 17 low-power, and translator stations from Telemundo in 2002 for $2.7 billion [8]. Viacom also attempted to purchase Univision for $7 billion in its quest to gain access to more Latinos. Shortly after Viacom's failed effort to purchase this network, Univision Communications purchased Hispanic Broadcasting Corp, the largest Spanish-language radio network in the U.S., for a $3.5 billion stock merger [3]. Univision's acquisition of this broadcasting network will add 63 new radio stations to media conglomerate [3]. Perhaps, more importantly, the newly integrated Univision will have the ability to provide advertisers like film companies with the ability to run its advertisements through a variety of media outlets ranging from Internet, broadcasting, and television. These media outlets will have direct access to a growing number of Spanish-speaking and bilingual viewers, which is quickly becoming a valuable demographic for marketers [3].

This trend of purchasing entertainment companies began in the late 20th century, but the acquisition of Spanish-language media outlets has recently become especially valuable for the following three reasons. First, mainstream companies will be interested in these media outlets, because they are attracting a great deal of advertising revenue from a variety of large companies. The income generated by Spanish-language media

during the most recent economic slump gives these conglomerates the appearance that these media outlets are recession proof. Second, a Spanish-language media outlet will provide easy access to a growing number of U.S. Latino audiences, who often shun English-language television programming. Lastly, the media merger boom that began in the late 1980s and accelerated in the mid-1990s, which formally allowed film studios and television networks to combine, has resulted in tightly integrated conglomerates that control the mass media industries [21]. After General Electric officially purchased Vivendi Universal, these five companies Viacom (CBS), AOL Time Warner (WB), Walt Disney (ABC), News Corporation (FOX), and General Electric (NBC, UPN) now control the majority of broadcast and cable audiences and are affiliated with a film studio [21]. As these conglomerates quickly run out of general market media outlets to purchase, they will begin to increasingly look at the growing and lucrative Spanish-language media outlets within the U.S.

The acquisition of Telemundo by NBC has intensified the competition for Spanish-language, bilingual, and English-language Latino viewers between Telemundo and Univision. Telemundo has already been able to improve the network's programming by acquiring some of NBC's primetime programming like *The Golden Globe Awards, The Miss Universe Pageant, Fear Factor*, and dubbing the Latino drama *Kingpin* into Spanish [22, 23]. Telemundo planned to air two series, *La Cenicienta* and *Amor Descarado*, with closed captions in English in order to attract a broader audience [24]. NBC has also promoted its Spanish-language shows on its English-language programs [24]. Furthermore, the network is producing a television series titled *Los Teens* that will

represent the network's first attempt to target U.S. Latinos [5]. Telemundo has also developed a production deal with Jennifer Lopez's production company, Nuyorico, which will produce a telenovela for the network [6]. The fight for U.S. Latino viewers has extended into the cable industry as Telemundo developed a cable spinoff, mun2 Television, that will target third and fourth generation Latinos and produce some Spanglish programming that can challenge Galavision's stranglehold on the cable market [5]. Telemundo is apparently hoping that this cable channel will resonate with bilingual and English-speaking Latinos, who traditionally tend to be ignored by both Spanish-language and mainstream networks, but are becoming an increasingly valuable audience. If Telemundo's efforts to improve its programming attract more English-language and bilingual Latino viewers, advertisers will have a valuable promotional outlet for their goods and services.

Despite Telemundo's efforts to increase its market share, Univision remains the dominant Spanish-language television network in the U.S., attracting 70% of the Latino audience [5]. Univision draws a staggering number of Latino teen and young adult viewers between the ages of 18-34. Univision attracts a larger number of these Latino viewers than the other six English-language networks combined, which makes it an extremely useful advertising outlet for marketers seeking this audience [5]. In spite of its success, Univision developed yet another network, Telefutura, in order to increase its programming diversity and potentially tap into Telemundo's viewership [22]. The network planned to feature more Hollywood films in an effort to target an increasing number of acculturated Latino audiences, whose viewing needs have not been addressed

by Univision [22]. In order to attract more Latino males, Telefutura will feature sports programming that will be in direct competition to Univision's popular telenovelas [22]. The development of this network is Univision's strategy to retain its male and bilingual viewers, which are extremely valuable demographics for advertisers.

Within the motion picture industry, Arenas Entertainment hoped to successfully exploit the expanding Latino movie going audience by producing, promoting, and distributing U.S. Latino films. In some respects this company is modeling itself in a manner similar to Miramax and New Line Cinema, because it is not directly competing with Hollywood studios. Arenas Entertainment is targeting an easily identifiable niche audience – Spanish-speaking and English-speaking Latinos. This Latino-oriented company initially developed a partnership with Universal Pictures to create the first Latino production, distribution, and talent management company [25]. This organization hopes to develop a pipeline of films that will attract primarily U.S. Latino audiences and in some cases mainstream audiences by identifying key Latino theaters in the United States. Arenas' first independent venture will be *Nicotina* (2003), which stars Diego Luna. The successful launching of this motion picture will be important for this distributor, because it will build credibility with producers, filmmakers, and exhibitors.

The development of the first Latino distributor coincides with a growing number of high quality U.S. Latino, Latin American and Spanish films that are now being seen by a growing number of U.S. audiences and recognized by their Hollywood peers. For example, U.S. Latino, Latin American, and Spanish films received an unprecedented amount of critical success at the 2003 Academy Awards by being nominated for ten

Oscars [13]. Salma Hayek earned a Best Actress nomination for *Frida* (2002) [13]. In addition, this film garnered an additional five nominations for art direction, costume design, makeup, original song, and original score [26]. Spain's Pedro Almodovar received two nominations for Best Director and screenwriting for *Habla con Ella* (*Talk to Her*) (2002) [26]. Mexico's Alfonso Cuaron earned a screenwriting nomination for *Y Tu Mama Tambien* (2001), while its entry *El Crimen del Padre Amaro* (2002) was one of choices for Best Foreign Film [26]. At the 2004 Academy Awards, *City of God* (*Cuidade de Deus*) (2002) was the most acclaimed Latin American film earning four Oscar nominations for cinematography, directing, editing, and best adapted screenplay. Beyond receiving acclaim from the Academy, the Oscars provide a significant amount of free publicity for these motion pictures.

The critical success of Latin American films at the Oscars also reflected the growing popularity of these motion pictures with a broader number of American audiences. The recognition of Latin American films in the United States is a relatively recent trend. For many years, Latin American filmmakers were often handicapped by the lack of a native film industry or by the dearth of available production funds. Even when a Latin American filmmaker was able to produce a film, American distributors often did not perceive these films to be highly marketable or attractive to either art film or Spanish-speaking audiences. However, in recent years, Latin American films like *City of God* have been eagerly acquired by U.S. distributors, especially after the success of Mexican films like *Amores Perros* and *Y Tu Mama Tambien* [27]. Currently, independent distributors and studio affiliated art divisions like IFC Films, Lions Gate, and Sony

Pictures Classics are seeking films from Latin America [27]. Independent distributors have also benefited from a growing number of Latino film festivals in Los Angeles, San Diego, Chicago, Miami, and New York, because they provide a forum where distributors have several opportunities to view these motion pictures and in close proximity to their offices [27]. Simultaneously, these film festivals have become an extremely valuable tool for filmmakers, because these venues offer their films with the ability to secure screens and give their motion pictures with free publicity in the expensive and highly competitive U.S. marketplace.

The success of Mexican and Spanish films has led to more Latin American films from Brazil and Argentina being acquired, promoted, and distributed by U.S. companies. For example, Argentina's *Nueve Reinas* (2000) centers on a professional con artist who begins to train a rookie in the art of scamming people. In the process of this exercise, they attempt to sell a businessman a counterfeit sheet of German stamps called the Nueve Reinas. The film was Argentina's biggest blockbuster in more than ten years and premiered at the Telluride Film Festival [28]. Lions Gate Films eventually acquired *Nueve Reinas*. The motion picture debuted on five screens in April 2002 and generated a box office of $40,724. The distributor did not circulate the film widely. *Nueve Reinas* only reached a high of 36 screens. The film had a long run of 25 weeks and grossed about $1.2 million. In spite of its modest box office, this film represents one of the most successful Argentine motion pictures in the United States in quite some time.

Miramax circulated a Brazilian motion picture titled *City of God* (2002) that chronicles the lives of a group of childhood friends who grow up in the tough slums of

Rio de Janeiro. This grim story was extremely popular with middle and upper-class Brazilian moviegoers, as the film sold over 3 million tickets and broke box office records [29, 30]. Despite the fact that *City of God* was a Portuguese-language film; the motion picture resonated with American audiences. Miramax took advantage of the excellent word-of-mouth and the publicity of a Golden Globe nomination to keep the motion picture in American theaters for over nine months. At this time, *City of God* has earned a box office of $7.5 million over a theatrical run that has lasted over a year. The initial launch that began in January 2003 never reached over 108 screens, but Miramax aggressively broadened the distribution of the film in February 2004 to nearly 250 screens, especially after the film earned four Oscar nominations. *City of God* represents first Brazilian film in recent memory to appeal with a significant number of American moviegoers.

Spanish film director Pedro Almovodar sustained his long string of successful art house films with *Habla con Ella* (2002), a motion picture centering on an interesting relationship that two men have with two comatose female patients. After the film received excellent reviews, Sony Pictures Classic launched a promotional campaign that attempted to get the film a Best Picture nomination [31]. The distributor increased the film's Oscar campaign when it became apparent that Spain inexplicably was not going to submit this film as its official entry for Best Foreign Film [31]. This film did excellent business in the United States and had a long theatrical run of 20 weeks, earning about $9.5 million. The box office success of this film illustrates Almovadar's unique ability to produce films that attract American art house audiences, a trend that began in the late

1980s with *Mujures al borde de un ataque de nervios* (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*) (1988).

The Mexican film industry continued to produce distinguished and edgy motion pictures like *Y Tu Mama Tambien* and *El Crimen del Padre Amaro*. *Y Tu Mama Tambien* is a film about two teenage boys, who go on a road trip with an attractive, older woman. IFC Films ran a dual campaign that targeted both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking moviegoers [32]. For the Spanish-language audiences, the distributor produced television, radio, and print advertisements that focused on the film's story and humor [32]. For the English-language audiences, the distributor did not promote the film as a Spanish-language film; instead it promoted the film as a crossover film [32]. IFC also highlighted the great reviews that the film received and attempted to emphasize the sexiness and quality of the film [32]. The initial success of IFC's promotional campaign enabled *Y Tu Mama Tambien* to do well in art houses and encouraged many of the larger general market exhibition chains to also screen this film in their theaters [27]. IFC also benefited by releasing the film in March and debuting before many of the summer blockbusters [33]. This strategy allowed IFC to secure screens in both art houses and mainstream theaters near heavily populated Latino areas in Los Angeles and New York [33]. IFC initially debuted the motion picture on only 40 screens in March 2002 and earned approximately $408,000. The distributor slowly expanded the number of screens until it reached a high of 282 on its seventh week. *Y Tu Mama Tambien* ultimately had a theatrical run of twenty weeks and earned about $13.6 million. The extraordinary

success of this film illustrated that the American general public may be becoming more accepting of Spanish-language films.

Mexico followed the success of *Y Tu Mama También* with the controversial *El Crimen del Padre Amaro* (2002). Samuel Goldwyn acquired and distributed this Mexican film about a young priest (Gael Garcia Bernal) who has an affair with a young parishioner (Ana Claudia Talancon). The motion picture created such a stir among conservative Mexican groups that they tried to ban it from being screened [34]. They even sued the Mexican government who paid for a portion of the production costs [34]. In spite of this dispute, the motion picture broke box office records in Mexico within 20 days [35]. Samuel Goldwyn Films initially targeted cities with a large number of art house audiences and cities with a large number of Latinos like Los Angeles and Chicago [36]. The distributor ran a Spanish-language radio and television advertising campaign in these markets [36]. The distributor released *El Crimen del Padre Amaro* on 45 screens in five cities in November 2002 and earned $476,440 on its opening weekend [36, 37]. Samuel Goldwyn slowly expanded the scope of its release until it reached a high of 137 screens on its fifth week. The distributor took advantage of *El Crimen del Padre Amaro's* Academy Award nomination in order to extend the film's run. The motion picture had a long run of 21 weeks and earned over $5.5 million. Perhaps, more important than the film's box office figures was the motion picture's subject matter that illustrates that Mexican filmmakers now have more creative freedom to produce projects that even depict sacred Catholic priests critically. Simultaneously, the fact that a U.S.

distributor would take a chance on *El Crimen del Padre Amaro* demonstrates that film marketers now believe that they can find an audience for Latin American films.

The controversial themes, interesting subject matter, and excellent filmmaking enabled Latin American films to succeed in a marketplace that was glutted by many independent English-language movies. The sheer number of independent films resulted in a marketplace where independent distributors could no longer depend on positive reviews from notable critics to successfully open a film, because there were simply too many movies that were being reviewed on a weekly basis [38]. To exacerbate matters for independents, the majority of independent film reviews were relegated to the back of newspapers, since the front pages were occupied by large and often colorful advertisements from Hollywood blockbuster films [38]. Independent films simply did not have the marketing budgets of blockbusters or even specialty division films from Hollywood studios in order purchase these huge announcements in significant newspapers like *The New York Times* or *The Los Angeles Times* that allowed them to have easy and quick access to a large number of potential independent moviegoers.

Another huge problem for many independent films was the lack of a marketing budget in order to remain visible, especially during the highly competitive summer and Christmas windows. In order to gain any visibility and save on soaring marketing costs, many independent films typically have had to rely on publicity through special events, premieres, contests, fliers, and postcards that would hopefully be paid for by the film's promotional partner [39]. Some of the more fortunate independent films receive much needed promotional assistance from Landmark Theaters, which is adept at grass root

promotional campaigns that target local art film audiences [40]. Furthermore, even when a low-budget film is able to develop some visibility within this marketplace, a smaller distributor with a good film continued to encounter the persistent problem of losing its screens to larger and more powerful distributors. For example, despite its great success, IFC's *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002) initially had trouble holding on to theaters, because of the exhibitors' long-standing relationships with larger distributors [33].

Nevertheless, despite the highly competitive film market, many Latin American films in 2002-2003 were able to compete successfully against English-language art films. In addition, Latin American and Spanish films like *Y Tu Mama Tambien* were able to hold their own against the big studio films. These films also benefited from a deluge of huge blockbuster summer films and the lack of quality motion pictures over the past two years, which have failed to attract general audiences. The one summer film that apparently resonated with audiences and enjoyed a significant run was Disney's *Finding Nemo* (2003) [41]. Consequently, many art film distributors were able to attract audiences to alternative movies like *Habla con Ella* [41].

The Promotion of Early 21st Century Films

Similar to Latin American and Spanish films, U.S. Latino films were also becoming a profitable staple for specialty distributors of this period. For instance, Dimension Films, a Disney-affiliated distributor, and Robert Rodriguez combined creativity with promotional savvy to have an excellent run at the box office. The other Disney affiliate, Miramax slowly expanded *Frida's* reach from October until the end of the year and had an extremely long and successful theatrical run. Two other U.S. Latino

films and a hybrid U.S. Latino film were slowly released by their respective distributors and that had extensive runs were *Real Women Have Curves* (2002), *The Dancer Upstairs* (2002), and *Raising Victor Vargas* (2002). In contrast to the Latino art films runs, Arenas Entertainment/Universal's *Empire* debuted in a fairly wide release in December. The only box office disappointment of this group was *Chasing Papi* (2003). The film received poor reviews and failed to attract Latino moviegoers despite the fact it was circulated in the early spring, traditionally one of the less competitive windows of the year and secured a high number of screens. Despite this one box office disappointment, U.S. Latino films of the early portions of the 21st century were lucrative. The following paragraphs describe how these films were distributed and promoted within this marketplace.

Dimension attempted to develop a profitable franchise with Robert Rodriguez's Spy Kids series. *Spy Kids 2: Island of Lost Dreams* (2002) like the original centers on an ordinary-looking Latino family that leads a double life as super spies. The same cast members of the first film returned for this motion picture with the notable addition of Ricardo Montalban. This was a first role for this long-time Latino actor since he became confined to a wheelchair after complications during back surgery [42]. Much of the publicity centered on the success of the previous film and the new gadgets being incorporated into this film. Director Robert Rodriguez and Antonio Banderas also received a great deal of exposure. A prearranged agreement between Dimension and McDonald's, one of the film's promotional tie-ins, forced the film to premiere around late July [43]. By the time, *Spy Kids 2* debuted in early August about a dozen children's

films had already been launched during that summer [44]. Consequently, this film could not overcome the competition from similar films and did not match the initial success of the first Spy Kids film. *Spy Kids 2* appeared on over 3,300 of screens and earned $16.7 million on its opening weekend. The film ultimately had a theatrical run of 18 weeks and earned over $85 million. Although, the sequel was not as successful as the original *Spy Kids,* this film only cost $39 million to produce, so Dimension most likely earned a profit. After the success of these two films, Dimension planned to release a third *Spy Kids* film.

Miramax's savvy marketing campaign garnered six Oscar nominations for *Frida*, a motion picture about the life of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (Salma Hayek). Despite Miramax's ability to get recognition from the academy, this was the first time that the distributor was able to garner multiple Oscar nominations for a U.S. Latino film. The distributor took advantage of the vast amount of "free publicity" that the film had acquired over the years. The motion picture received a great deal of notoriety prior to the release of the film, simply because *Frida* had been rumored to be in development for several years. In the late 1980s, director Luis Valdez hired Laura San Giacomo to play Frida [13]. His casting decision caused such a commotion within the Latino community that the project was cancelled [13]. More recently, several actresses like Jennifer Lopez and Madonna had been attached to the role [45]. However, none of these actresses had the perseverance of Salma Hayek, who labored for eight long years in order to complete this project [45]. She overcame a variety of problems such as loss of funding, continual rewrites, switching studios, and directors quitting in order to complete this project [45].

Much of Miramax's publicity campaign focused on Salma Hayek's excellent performance and her determination to produce this motion picture. Despite some mixed reviews, *Frida* did benefit from some excellent notices from notable film critics like the *Chicago Sun-Times*' Roger Ebert [45]. Miramax slowly expanded the scope of this film's release from 5 screens in its first week to a high of over 700 screens by its fifth week. U.S. audiences were attracted to this motion picture about this infamous Mexican artist, as it was in the box office top 10 for a few weeks [46]. The film had an extremely long run of 26 weeks and earned nearly $27 million. Miramax most likely earned a profit, since the film only cost $12 million to produce.

HBO Pictures first venture into film distribution was an attempt to take advantage of the growing Latino market by releasing *Real Women Have Curves*. The film focuses on a generational struggle between a Latina teenager (America Ferrera) and her mother (Lupe Ontiveros). They disagree on a variety of issues including her future. She wants to attend college and her mother wants her to have a more traditional lifestyle that centers on losing weight and finding a husband. The motion picture initially received a great deal of attention at the Sundance Film Festival, where it won the audience and special jury awards [47]. Several U.S. distributors wanted to acquire the motion picture. However, HBO wanted to premiere the film on its cable channel [48]. Afterwards, at the Cannes Film Festival, *Real Women Have Curves* continued to attract a great deal of attention from foreign distributors. Many of these film buyers convinced HBO's Colin Callender to release the film domestically in order to increase the film's visibility abroad [48]. At this point, HBO developed a distribution partnership with Newmarket and the

film became the first domestic release of HBO Films [49]. HBO selected Newmarket in large part, because this company had just recently hired Bob Berney, who had successfully distributed *Y Tu Mama Tambien* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* [47]. Berney initially planned to mix the successful distribution release patterns of *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, which relied largely on word of mouth and the *Y Tu Mama Tambien* that focused on theaters near Latino neighborhoods [47]. The film initially debuted in New York and Los Angeles, before expanding to other markets [50]. HBO and Newmarket slowly released *Real Women Have Curves* on 55 screens and earned about $183,000 on its opening weekend. The distributor gradually expanded the range of the film's theatrical run to 163 screens by its sixth week. *Real Women Have Curves* had a long theatrical run of 24 weeks and grossed about $5.8 million. HBO may have earned a small profit, since the motion picture cost $3 million to produce.

Arenas Entertainment also launched its first film that would potentially attract a large number of Latino moviegoers with *Empire* (2002), a motion picture about a Puerto Rican drug dealer (John Leguizamo), who tries to escape his criminal past by developing a partnership with a "legitimate" investor (Peter Sarsgaard). The film featured a multi-cultural cast members like John Leguizamo, Peter Sarsgaard, Denise Richards, and Sonia Braga that may appeal to a broad audience. *Empire* premiered at the Sundance Film Festival [51]. After a warm reception at Sundance, the motion picture continued to struggle in securing a distributor, but Arenas finally acquired the motion picture [52]. Arenas Entertainment had a major breakthrough with the successful debut of its first film, *Empire*. Using the distribution muscle of Universal Pictures and Arenas' marketing

savvy, the film premiered in nearly 870 theaters and earned a box office of $6.2 million. *Empire* ultimately had a theatrical run of eight weeks and generated a box office gross of $17.5 million and additional $22 million in DVD and video sales. The film was an extremely profitable venture for Arenas and its financial partners, since the motion picture was acquired for about $1.75 million.

An independent U.S. Latino film that centers on Dominicans in New York City that debuted in May 2003 was *Raising Victor Vargas*. Samuel Goldwyn promoted this film that concentrates on Victor Vargas' (Victor Rasuk) budding romance with the neighborhood beauty, Juicy Judy (Judy Marte), and his troubled relationship with his grandmother (Altagracia Guzman). The motion picture did not cast any professional actors. Instead, director Peter Sollett put up flyers in New York's Lower East Side and conducted auditions in order to cast the film. As a result, the promotional campaign highlighted Sollett and his unique strategy for casting the film. *Raising Victor Vargas* received a standing ovation at the Cannes Film Festival and received favorable reviews from numerous film critics [53]. Samuel Goldwyn Films slowly expanded the release of *Raising Victor Vargas*, but the distributor never released the film beyond 39 screens. Despite the film's limited release, the motion picture had a fairly long theatrical run of 20 weeks and earned about $2 million. Samuel Goldwyn may have earned a small profit, since the film only cost $800,000 to produce.

An additional art film distributor that tried to target the expanding Latino audience was Fox 2000. This company distributed *Chasing Papi*, a romantic comedy about three Latinas who discover that they are being three-timed by a handsome young

man and attempt to teach him a lesson. The cast was not well known to mainstream audiences. However, the diverse Latino talent was well known to many Spanish-speaking and some English-speaking Latinos. Prior to starring in this feature film, Eduardo Verastegui (Papi) was a Mexican soap opera star and a trendy singer [54]. Roselyn Sanchez, who plays an attorney, is a well-known Puerto Rican actress that had appeared in several films like *Rush Hour 2* (2001) [54]. Sofia Vergara, who plays a character similar to Charo, is from Columbia and is popular with audiences in Latin America [55]. Jaci Velasquez, the spoiled rich girl, is a Christian and Tejano singer [55]. The diverse backgrounds of the talent suggest that Fox was attempting to appeal to a broad Latino audience.

Fox 2000 focused much of the *Chasing Papi* promotional campaign on the Latino market [56]. The distributor even changed the film's title from *Papi Chulo* to *Chasing Papi* in order to avoid potentially offending any segments of this ethnic group and appeal to a broader Latino audience [56]. The motion picture was heavily advertised on Spanish-language radio [57]. In addition, the distributor pushed the film in Latino markets like New York, Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Diego [55]. Furthermore, Jeep did a promotional tie-in with the film that included English-language and Spanish-language television commercials and hosted *Chasing Papi* theme events in Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and Miami [58]. Chrysler and Maybelline also developed promotional tie-ins with the motion picture, as these companies were eager to promote their products to the growing English-speaking Latino audience [56]. Despite the Latino focus, the distributor opted to release the film only in English, because Fox

contended that Latinos generally watch films in English [55]. In spite of the distributor's efforts to build a buzz, this film did not appeal to either Latino or mainstream audiences. *Chasing Papi* debuted on 500 screens in late April, grossing $2 million [57]. This film had a seven-week theatrical run that only generated a box office of $6.1 million. *Chasing Papi* was a box office disappointment, since it cost $10 million to produce.

Fox Searchlight acquired and distributed a hybrid U.S. Latino film titled *The Dancer Upstairs*. This film focuses on a Latin American lawyer turned police officer named Augustin Rejas (Javier Bardem) and his quest to track down a legendary terrorist named Ezequiel, along the way he begins to fall in love with a dance teacher (Laura Morante). Fox Searchlight picked up the film for $2.5 million at the Sundance Film Festival [59]. The distributor promoted the film as John Malkovich's directorial debut to mainstream audiences. The distributor also highlighted the recent attention Javier Bardem had received at recent award ceremonies like the Oscars. It also implemented a Spanish-language promotional campaign by using Javier Bardem for interviews on Spanish-language media and on *Hispanic* magazine. The film also received good reviews from a variety of publications like *The Los Angeles Times*, *Variety*, and *The New York Times*.

Fox Searchlight implemented a platform release for the film. It initially debuted the film in May 2003 on thirteen screens and earned about $106,000. The distributor slowly expanded the release until *The Dancer Upstairs* reached a high of 152 screens in its fourth week, which grossed $640,000 at the box office. The film ultimately grossed a little more than $2.3 million over its 16-week theatrical run. Fox Searchlight may have

lost some money in this venture, since the distributor did not earn a box office gross that matched or exceeded its acquisitions costs.

In 2003, Dimension and Robert Rodriguez combined once again to release the third part of lucrative Spy Kids franchise. *Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over* once again focuses on the Latino spy family. *Spy Kids 3-D* was more successful than the second installment, because unlike *Spy Kids 2* that competed directly with nearly a dozen children films, this motion picture was preceded by far fewer kid films [44]. In addition, this film also attracted a larger number of young teens [44]. According to a Miramax survey, many kids were fascinated with the funny 3-D eyeglasses that were being distributed at the film [44, 60]. The distributor was surprised by how many kids were drawn to the 3-D aspect of the film [61]. This special effect attracted a lot of children, who were not accustomed to watching a 3-D movie [61]. Many of the kids walked out of the theaters with their 3-D glasses still on [60]. In addition, *Spy Kids 3-D* apparently drew many moviegoers, who had attended the previous two Spy Kids, as 60% of the audience eagerly anticipated watching the movie [62]. *Spy Kids*' genre was also cited as a reason for attending the film [62]. The third version of this franchise film debuted on over 3,300 screens and grossed about $33.4 million on its first weekend, which made it the number one grossing film for a week in late July. This film had a stronger opening week than either *Spy Kids* ($25.5 million) or *Spy Kids 2* ($16.7 million). The film had a theatrical run of 13 weeks and earned a box office gross of nearly $111 million. Dimension most likely earned a profit during its theatrical run, since it cost $39 million to produce.

Robert Rodriguez continued his incredible run with another number-one hit *Once Upon A Time in Mexico*. This motion picture was the third part of his *El Mariachi* trilogy. Sony's promotional campaign highlighted Antonio Banderas, Johnny Depp, and Salma Hayek in order to attract a broader audience than the previous two films [63]. In addition, despite being a bilingual film, Sony did not promote this film as a U.S. Latino film. The film's marketers focused on the action and adventure, which apparently appealed to a large number of young people. Nearly 55% of the audience, who attended the film's opening week, was under the age of 25 [63]. Sony Films widely debuted *Once Upon Time in Mexico* on over 3,200 screens. The film earned about $23.4 million, which almost equaled the total box office of the previous *El Mariachi* (Desperado) [63]. The film had a theatrical box office of $55.8 after seven weeks. Sony may have earned a small profit with *Once Upon A Time in Mexico*, since it only $29 million to produce.

In summary, part of the reason for the success of most of these U.S. Latino films of this period was that fairly large art film or studio distributors like Miramax promoted these motion pictures. None of these films were promoted or released by a small independent distributor that did not have any political clout to secure screens and the marketing budget to buy some visibility. As a result, U.S. Latino films like *Spy Kids 3-D* were able to secure screens and had the promotional budgets in order to gain some recognition in the press. Perhaps more importantly, these distributors were able to keep these films in theaters for a significant amount of time. This allowed some of these U.S. Latino films to develop a word of mouth among moviegoers, which is so important for art films.

Summary of Key Events of the Early 21st Century

If properly promoted, U.S. Latino films have the potential to be extremely lucrative as the population of this market continues to skyrocket. The future projections and buying power of this ethnic group are extraordinary. Although U.S. Latino films are performing better that the box office and are generally lucrative, mainstream companies like motion picture distributors are still not spending enough money on Spanish-language marketing in order to fully realize its potential. Furthermore, marketers of U.S. Latino films still have limited advertising outlets on U.S. networks, which is further complicated by the lack of Latino talent or Latino programming on English-language networks. Consequently, they still must rely primarily on marketing their films on Spanish-language networks like Telemundo and Univision, which is an effective strategy for reaching bilingual and Spanish-speaking Latinos, but it does not reach English-speaking Latinos who watch mainstream programming.

Many Spanish-speaking Latinos and art film audiences of this period were attracted to a growing number of Latin American and Spanish films that are being released in the United States. Part of the reason that films from this region have become successful with U.S. audiences is that the Mexican, Spanish, Argentine, and Brazilian film industries are now producing better motion pictures. These high quality Latin American and Spanish films typically do not cost a great deal, since production funds are often limited in these countries. As a result, these films will continue to be valuable acquisitions for U.S. specialty film distributors, because they can fairly easily produce a profit with these films.

Similar to Latin American films, the majority of U.S. Latino films were somewhat profitable for U.S. distributors. The only U.S. Latino film that did not generate a box office gross that either matched or exceeded its production or its acquisition costs was *Chasing Papi*. Most U.S. Latino art films produced box office receipts that doubled their production costs. The key reason why most U.S. Latino films were able to generate these box office grosses was that fairly large art film distributors released these motion pictures. These distributors were able to keep U.S. Latino films in theaters for a long period of time, which had not been the case for many U.S. Latino art films that were released in the previous two decades.

The string of higher quality films being produced throughout Latin America, Spain, and by U.S. Latinos provides an excellent opportunity for an emerging Latino-oriented distributor like Arenas Entertainment. First, the higher number of excellent U.S. Latino and Spanish-language films makes it possible for this distributor to be able to select a quality film at a reasonable price. In addition, this company has developed an excellent reputation for being able to effectively promote feature films and other media to this audience. They are marketing experts for this particular niche market. Arenas Entertainment knows this niche market better than most of its competitors. Given this competitive advantage, there is no reason why this distributor cannot flourish in its distribution venture.

While more U.S. Latino films of this era were being successfully promoted by art film distributors; I believe we will begin to see less U.S. Latino films being distributed by independents. In previous eras, especially in the early 1980s, U.S. Latino films were

successfully distributed and marketed by independent distributors that did not have large marketing budgets. However, as the U.S. marketplace becomes more competitive, these distributors will have an increasingly difficult time buying expensive television advertisements or being able to purchase a sufficient number of radio spot ads, which will reach an adequate number of a film's target market. In addition, as Spanish-language media becomes more popular and is able to demand higher advertising rates, independents will have a more difficult time paying for this vital visibility. Lastly, a simple grass roots marketing effort without some media support will not be effective future strategy in attracting a large enough number of Latino moviegoers into theaters, because individuals of this ethnic groups are becoming more reliant on the mass media for their primary source of information. Consequently, a distributor will have to implement an additional print, broadcasting, or television advertising campaign in order to create awareness within the community.

During the early years of the 21st century, Robert Rodriguez was the one Latino filmmaker that appeared to understand how to attract both mainstream and Latino audiences. In 2003, this filmmaker had two number one box office hits within a matter of weeks. Much of Rodriguez's success with both Latino and mainstream audiences was that Dimension Films or Sony did not simply categorize his *Spy Kids* trilogy or *Once Upon Time in Mexico* as Latino films. Although Rodriguez's films predominately had Latino casts and obviously told a Latino story, he was able to incorporate these elements within an interesting story like *Spy Kids*, which revolved around a lot of action. Consequently, Latinos enjoyed these films because they were a positive and unique

representation of Latinos. At the same time, this story about a Latino spy family attracted a large number of mainstream moviegoers, who were simply enjoyed it as a kids' film. As a result, Rodriguez's films have been able to cast a wide net and attract a diverse audience.

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Chapter 8: The Evolution of U.S. Latino Films

Over the past two decades, the U.S. Latino market has evolved slowly from a small, emerging market to one of the largest niche markets in the United States. Along with the gradual transformation, this niche market has attracted sporadic attention from Hollywood distributors. At times, studio marketers like Universal and Warner Bros. seem intent on trying to expand and target this audience by implementing dual Spanish and English promotional campaigns. But then suddenly, studios stopped distributing U.S. Latino films for a period of time. For instance, after the Hispanic Hollywood (1987 –1988), when Hollywood distributors promoted several motion pictures, a studio did not develop, acquire, or distribute another U.S. Latino film until *American Me* in 1992. Over these two decades, studios' focus shifted slowly from domestic markets to more lucrative global territories. Simultaneously, studio-affiliated specialty divisions have been increasingly targeting potentially lucrative, domestic niche markets like U.S. Latinos with film product. Throughout this period, large and small distributors have gone through a huge learning curve in their efforts to target this elusive audience. They have experimented with various marketing strategies ranging from grassroots marketing to a typical studio release. These plans have resulted in surprising hits and unexpected failures. In this chapter, I provide a brief summary of these two decades by highlighting some of the key generative mechanisms that have made these different eras unique. I point out some of the barriers to success that both Hollywood and the U.S. Latino community need to overcome in order to fulfill its box office potential. I make several

recommendations to distributors on how to improve the box office figures of U.S. Latino films. Lastly, I cite limitations of this study and I propose further areas of study.

Early 1980s

U.S. Latino films were a relatively new type of English-language motion picture that was being introduced to the American audiences. Prior to this occurrence, when many people thought of a U.S. Latino film, they immediately thought of a Spanish-language film that targeted Spanish-speaking moviegoers. Since many U.S. moviegoers typically did not speak Spanish and tend not to prefer films with subtitles, this would be a tough perception to overcome. As a result, these films needed critics like Janet Maslin from *The New York Times* or Roger Ebert from the *Chicago Sun-Times* who could bring motion pictures in from outside the margins and introduce them to art film audiences, who were more likely to accept these alternative films. These mainstream critics provided these motion pictures with instant credibility among American art film moviegoers and brought U.S. Latino films into the margins of the U.S. motion picture market structure, because they were able to convey that these were films that U.S. audiences would enjoy.

While the motion picture critic was an important individual in bringing U.S. Latino films into the U.S. market structure, the eventual influence of these films was quite limited. The primary reason Latino films did not have a great impact on the U.S. film structure was that they lacked sufficient print and advertising (P & A) budgets in order to effectively compete with both studio and independent films. Some of these distributors attempted to overcome this lack of a promotional budget by developing intensive grassroots marketing campaigns in order to galvanize local Latino groups.

They felt that an aggressive word-of-mouth strategy within the Latino community, which centered on free screenings and local appearances by celebrities, could be an alternative strategy to a mass media advertising campaign.

Some scholars like Noriega believed that an aggressive grassroots marketing plan was an effective means to promote a film within the Latino community, because short, mediated advertising campaigns did not provide the viewer with a sufficient amount of the story. As a result, the viewer was sometimes left with stereotypical perceptions of the film. He contends that this occurred to some of the U.S. Latino films of this particular era like *Zoot Suit*, which ultimately affected their box office potential. While I do agree that media advertising campaigns are not always the most effective means of promoting an alternative story, because the viewer often places these motion pictures into simple categories. My study illustrates that these grassroots campaigns within the Latino community were not necessary or essential at that particular point in time. The most successful U.S. Latino films (*Kiss of the Spider Woman*) of this era did not implement a grassroots marketing campaign within the Latino community. The other box office winner of the period *El Norte* did not implement this strategy until it had generated a great deal of word of mouth outside this niche market.

While some film marketers and scholars felt that grassroots marketing within the Latino community could be an effective plan, other marketers opted for another strategy. They decided to avoid placing a Latino or Mexican label on the motion picture. They felt that this label would ghettoize the motion picture by limiting its potential appeal to U.S. moviegoing audiences. At that point in time, Mexican films were not perceived as being good quality motion pictures in the early 1980s, so it would certainly be box office

suicide for these motion pictures to be labeled with this term. With that in mind, film marketers of U.S. Latino films felt it was important to attract the opinion makers outside the Latino community, before trying to galvanize this ethnic group. The marketing strategy to purposely ignore or not place a great deal of confidence in one of your eventual target markets is quite risky. But, as writer Anna Thomas so perceptively and correctly stated during our interview, "The Latino community was sort of insecure in itself and not ready to lead the parade on something". This was a community that for all intents and purposes was still generally ostracized by the mainstream public. The opinion of this ethnic group at that particular point in time was not going to be taken seriously by either the mainstream or art film moviegoing audience. So if U.S. Latino films wanted to be taken seriously the American moviegoing audience, they would have to avoid the Latino label and they would have to shun Spanish-speaking theaters, because these theaters also did not have a great reputation among moviegoers. Again, marketers were seeking moviegoers from within the U.S. film structure in order to draw marginalized motion pictures like U.S. Latino films into the marketplace.

The Kiss of the Spider Woman was the only U.S. Latino film that was able to successfully garner critical support and avoid the Latino label in order to get widespread acceptance from U.S. film audiences. In addition, the film got an extra boost in publicity when Rock Hudson admitted to having acquired AIDS. This film provided an excellent marketing template that other art films could attempt to emulate in the future. Simultaneously, the film had the full support of its distributor, which had the resources to take advantage of the "buzz" it created. The other distributors of U.S. Latino films of this period did not have the same resources. These distributors were just not ready for this

opening within the U.S. marketplace. This was a perfect opportunity that most of these distributors failed to take advantage of. Many exhibitors were clamoring for film product outside the studio system and these film companies just did not have an ample number of prints or the marketing funds to penetrate this market.

Although the lack of an advertising budget and prints could be sufficient reasons why many U.S. Latino films did not perform well at the box office, I also contend that the relatively low box office figures for most of these early U.S. Latino films illustrates that these motion pictures were not attractive to many art film or Latino moviegoers. These Latino filmmakers generally failed to produce highly commercial motion pictures that appealed to both audiences and studio distributors alike. The U.S. Latino market remained essentially unproven, because most film marketers of this era did not attempt to target this film audience aggressively. They were trying to attract art film moviegoers first and foremost. Consequently, I agree with Trevino's notion that the box office and investor's were going to eventually determine what would be the dominant form of these Latino motion pictures. Unfortunately, at this point in time, the primary focus of marketers on art film audiences gave the appeared that non-Latino moviegoers were going to determine the prevailing form of U.S. Latino films.

Outside of Chicano cinema, Cuban filmmakers were also attempting to develop their own cinematic form. The one Cuban film that received U.S. theatrical distribution in this period was *Crossover Dreams*. This motion picture was not quite as political as *Zoot Suit* or *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez*. Ana Lopez contends that this film symbolized the second era of Cuban filmmakers, who were not quite as political as their predecessors. In some ways, I believe that this Cuban film was a little ahead its time,

because it tackles the sacrifices that an individual must make in order to crossover into mainstream culture. The retention of your culture or assimilation intersection that many immigrants have to deal with was not really being addressed by most of the U.S. Latino filmmakers from that particular period.

A study of this era also highlights the difficulty of introducing new types of films into the U.S. market. John Fiske points out that it is extremely difficult for large corporations to effectively target and attract niche audiences. Their biggest problem is that they are not familiar with these small niche markets. For example, Universal Pictures ran into this problem when they attempted to develop a motion picture from a popular local play titled *Zoot Suit*. The play was extremely successful within the Los Angeles area, because it was about a local event that had a great deal of significance to the Mexican-American community. However, outside of Los Angeles, many Latinos had not heard of the incident and did not find the subject matter to be compelling enough for them to attend a film about that topic. Universal's attempt to produce a motion picture about this group also illustrated how difficult it would be for a studio to develop a story about a Latino or a Latino incident and successfully attract this diverse and growing ethnic group.

Late 1980s

After many independent film distributors went out of business, studio distributors were able to regain control of the distribution portion of this industry. These distributors also benefited from the lack of growth within the exhibition industry, so they could once again be able to accommodate their demand for motion pictures. Ironically, during the late 1980s, U.S. Latino films would experience unprecedented success. Studio

distributors acquired or developed a number of U.S. Latino films. They really made an effort to effectively promote these motion pictures within the U.S. film structure, especially during the short-lived period of 1987 to 1988.

That is not to say that this film structure was now open to a broader array of motion picture distributors or types of films. Independent films still encountered an extremely difficult marketplace. The studios were now vertically integrated, which further entrenched them in a position that they had not experienced since the early 1940s. If anything, the lack of successful independent U.S. Latino films that emerged from this period indicated the growing disparity between studio and independent distributors. The structure made it imperative for U.S. Latino filmmakers to secure a distributor deal with large studio.

U.S. Latino filmmakers were able to find a more open structure for their films, because of the surprising success of *La Bamba*. Columbia Pictures followed David Forbes' recommendations that they should implement a full-scale Spanish-language campaign and that they should simultaneously release Spanish-language prints with English-language prints. The studio followed through with a brilliant marketing campaign that included a grassroots marketing campaign in heavily populated Latino zip codes and the promotion of the film at local supermarkets with the help of its corporate owner Coca-Cola. Lastly, the motion picture benefited from the hit single "La Bamba" by Los Lobos, which provide the film with an immense amount of free publicity on the radio and on MTV. Perhaps more importantly, the film debuted on over 1200 prints, which easily made it the widest release for a U.S. Latino film in contemporary Hollywood history.

This film influenced the Hollywood market structure for a brief two-year period. Hollywood studios no longer viewed that the U.S. Spanish-speaking market as not very lucrative or as a secondary market. Hollywood distributors like Universal began seeking additional U.S. Latino films with hopes of finding another profitable gem. Many of the U.S. Latino films that proceeded after *La Bamba* had similar promotional campaigns. These promotional strategies encompassed both a mass media and a grassroots marketing campaign. Hollywood studios began to include Spanish-language media and hired Latino marketing experts, who could assist them in more effectively targeting this market. They distributed subtitled and Spanish-language prints simultaneously with their English-language prints in order to take advantage of the "heat" generated by the general market campaign. They also widely released their films to mainstream theaters throughout America like never before. Simultaneously, as studio distributors widely released these motion pictures, the vital role of the critic became somewhat diminished for these films. The studios' wide releases along with a full-scale marketing campaign quickly introduced the American public to these motion pictures and provided a sense of legitimacy to these films. In the previous period, the critic had played a similar role in developing an awareness and word of mouth for these films.

These motion pictures were generally quite profitable for Hollywood distributors. However, none of the motion pictures that followed *La Bamba* would come close to emulating its success. In many ways, other film studios became and still remain overly fixated on *La Bamba's* box office figures. Studio marketers and the Latino community often unfairly use it as a barometer in comparing it with other U.S. Latino films that often do not possess its inherent commercial advantages. After 1988, Hollywood market

structure appears to once again lose interest in the Spanish-language market and U.S. Latino films. Consequently, the Hispanic Hollywood represents nothing more a few profitable films.

Charles Ramirez-Berg argues that these films represent the beginning of a third wave of Chicano filmmaking. He contends that these films continue to critique U.S. society, but they are done in subtle manner that is not obvious unlike the previous waves of Chicano filmmaking that were overtly political. I agree with Ramirez-Berg that the films like *Born in East LA* did not appear to be overtly political, because it was a comedy. Yet, the film was a satire that cleverly critiqued the U.S. immigrant system for its policies. At the same time, I believe that a dominant theme that Trevino suggested would happen to U.S. Latino films actually did occur among the studio U.S. Latino films of this particular era. Even independent U.S. Latino films like *Break of Dawn* and *Romero*, which debuted shortly after 1988, had similar themes. All of these motion pictures centered on a U.S. Latino or Latin American man, who takes on and overcomes the racist and unequal system. These films were the classic stories of the underdog that appealed to both mainstream and Latino audiences for a short period of time.

The late 1980s was a short-lived moment in time where the Hollywood structure embraced hybrid films like *La Bamba* in its pursuit to find another box office surprise. These distributors were able to circulate a few moneymaking films by utilizing a mixture of a general market and Spanish-language media campaign along with an intense grassroots marketing plan. They also able to take advantage of other forms of Latino popular culture like soundtracks in order to generate additional publicity for its films. The Hollywood studios briefly had figured out how to effectively promote U.S. Latino

motion pictures. But these motion pictures were not quite lucrative enough to keep the studios' interested in circulating these films, because they were becoming more interested in foreign and ancillary revenues and less on domestic niche market films. As a result, a U.S. Latino motion picture generally would not be a part of a studio's pipeline of films for the majority of the 1990s.

Early 1990s

The Hollywood film structure of this period went through a number of changes that would affect how it promoted niche market motion pictures like U.S. Latino films. Unlike the previous era, when the film structure basically encompassed a few studios and many independents that competed with one another on the margins of the structure, the film studios decided to acquire a few of these independent companies. The acquisition of a few prominent independent distributors like New Line Cinema and Miramax in 1992 completely altered the structure. The film industry was no longer a two-tiered structure. It became a three-tiered structure that featured independent, specialty division or niche market, and studio distributors. The U.S. Latino films of this era mirrored these changes and were promoted by a broad array of distributors.

The transformations within the structure made it extremely difficult for independent U.S. Latino films to effectively compete with studio or studio-affiliated distributors. At this point in time, independent organizations often found themselves competing for screens with these distributors. The structural changes made much less likely that an independent film like *Kiss of the Spider Woman* would emerge as a sleeper hit, because independent films had a much more difficult securing and remaining in theaters in order to build a word of mouth among moviegoers. On the other hand, if a

U.S. Latino film was acquired by a niche market distributor or a studio. This motion picture was most likely going to enjoy a long theatrical run or be screened in many theaters.

The three-tiered structure made it quite important and difficult for U.S. Latino films to gain access to Hollywood distributors. Some of the U.S. Latino films gained access into the Hollywood structure by entering industry-acknowledged film festivals like Cannes or Sundance. The goal of entering these film festivals was to secure a distributor that often frequented these events or at least garner some acclaim from an influential critic. These film festivals became quite important venue for U.S. Latino films like *Mi Vida Loca* and *I Like It Like That*, which eventually secured a distribution deal with a U.S. film marketer.

Most of the marketers of U.S. Latino films within this period decided to utilize a mass media campaign. However, most of these companies decided to not to conduct a comprehensive Spanish-language advertising campaign that included television, radio, and print. This was an odd strategy, because many of the U.S. Latinos films from the previous decade had used a great deal of Spanish-language marketing within their campaigns. In addition, these companies basically avoided using Spanish-language or subtitled prints. This strategy gave the impression that Hollywood and independent distributors had moved away from attempting to target this audience. Lastly, marketers of this era reverted to avoiding the Mexican or Latino label within its motion pictures, which had been a successful strategy during the early 1980s. In two particular cases, the marketers decided to target hip-hop or Black audiences instead of making a concerted in

trying to attract Latino moviegoers, which I believe was a lost opportunity for both motion pictures.

The moving of release dates appeared to also be a problem for distributors of U.S. Latino films. These companies could not seem to find an appropriate window for these films. Part of the problem was that the film industry was quickly becoming a highly competitive year around business. Prior to the early 1990s, the highly competitive windows were only the summer and the holiday period. The less competitive windows were in the early fall and spring. However, with the emergence of the megaplex, exhibitors need more film product quickly. The distributors responded by increasing their number of wide-releases. During this period, a motion picture was going to encounter competition from a few new releases on a weekly basis.

The box office performance for these films was quite mixed during this period. Some films like *Desperado* were profitable when you compare it to its production cost. On the other hand, *Bound by Honor* lost a great deal of money for Disney. Motion pictures about other Latino subgroups did not perform well at the box office. Apparently, these films about Cubans and Puerto Ricans did not interest many Mexican-American or mainstream audiences. Hollywood did not produce an extraordinary or surprising U.S. Latino box office hit in this period. The one film that may have had an excellent chance to perform better, but was handicapped by its niche marketing strategy and its release date was *My Family/Mi Familia*. New Line Cinema waited too long to implement a mainstream advertising campaign that could have benefited it in general markets outside the Southwestern United States. In addition, the distributor could have released the film in late winter or early spring to avoid competition from the blockbuster films of the

summer. Ultimately, the performance of these films left a lot of unanswered questions about how to properly release, distribute, and promote a U.S. Latino motion picture.

During this era, the number of U.S. Latino films that received theatrical distribution skyrocketed to thirteen, which almost equaled the amount of motion pictures about this ethnic group throughout the 1980s. Along with this growth, studio and independent distributors promoted a few films about other Latino subgroups like Puerto Ricans and Cubans. This represented the first time in the New Hollywood era that the studios had released a film that centered on Puerto Ricans. The inclusion of other Latino subgroups forced me to really expand my definition of a U.S. Latino film and think beyond just Mexican-American stories. Simultaneously, this period presents interesting questions about where Latino film scholars categorize films about Latinos that are directed by other ethnic groups. In this particular era alone, we had seven U.S. Latinos films that were directed by non-U.S. Latinos. This poses an interesting question about how to define these hybrid texts that were influenced by a wide array of cultures and ethnicities.

After apparently finding a lucrative formula in the previous period, U.S. Latino filmmakers of the early 1990s introduced a broader array of themes that typically revolved around ills of the Latino community or family. The gang films of this era did not perform well at the box office. Similar to previous eras, Latinos were not comfortable seeing themselves portrayed in a negative light, even when another Latino was telling the story. The other films such as *My Family/Mi Familia* that centered on Mexican or Latino families were more likely to be embraced this group. However, mainstream audiences did not really support these films. The uneven box office results

suggested that Latino filmmakers, independent, studio-affiliated, and Hollywood distributors were struggling in identifying profitable themes, outside of underdog stories of the late 1980s that would attract both Latino and mainstream audiences to U.S. Latino films.

Late 1990s-2001

DreamWorks entered the New Hollywood structure in this period. The introduction of a new major distributor provided a bit of hope for Latino filmmakers, because they had an additional option if they were seeking a distribution deal with a large marketer with some political clout to get their films into theaters. However, this distributor more or less opted to look for similar types of motion pictures that the other Hollywood studios were seeking. As a result, the New Hollywood structure continued to generally ignore U.S. Latino films. The studio distributors of this era are much more concerned with promoting high-concept films that are going to generate at least $100 million in both domestic and foreign box office receipts. In addition to these high-concept films, Hollywood distributors began to produce a number of multi-ethnic films that often featured an Anglo, Black, and Latino characters. These films often appealed to a broad domestic audience. Thus, several U.S. Latino films continued to be promoted by studio-affiliated distributors that tend to target domestic niche audiences. However, many U.S. Latino films of this period did not secure a distribution deal with either a studio or studio-affiliated distributor.

The lack of a distribution deal for many U.S. Latino films left them to operate on the margins of the New Hollywood structure. Despite being marginalized, the production of U.S. Latino films had never been better. During this short period of time, nineteen

U.S. Latino or hybrid U.S. Latino films were promoted and circulated by a wide variety of distributors. The high number of U.S. Latinos films being produced in this brief amount of time suggests that lack of product that historically beset this ethnic group's film industry was slowly becoming a problem of the past. However, these films still encountered problems in securing adequate distribution deals.

The marketers of these films implemented a wide array of promotional plans. Early within this period, the studios attempted to distribute simultaneously subtitled or Spanish-language prints along with English-language prints in 1997. This strategy only produced fair results at best. It would be the last time that studios would attempt this plan. Several studios, studio-affiliated, and independent distributors tried to promote their films with a song or a soundtrack. *Selena* appeared to be the one film that could benefit from a soundtrack, since the popular singer's last CD was being released shortly before the premiere of the motion picture. Numerous distributors of U.S. Latino films utilized a grassroots marketing approach. Again, *Selena* was the only motion picture that was able to generate a buzz within the Latino community with this plan. They were successful in large part, because they were assisted of *Latina* magazine.

Two other U.S. Latino films like *Spy Kids* were not specifically promoted as U.S. Latino films. These motion pictures generally avoided this label. *Before Night Falls* was promoted heavily to gay and art film audiences and *Spy Kids* was marketed as a kids film. While this approach had some success, the promotional plan that appeared to be the most successful was the promotional tie-in tactic that was utilized by *Selena* and *Spy Kids*. These two motion pictures were among the first U.S. Latino films to be approached by general market companies with this proposal. Banc One went so far as to place its logo

in the opening scene of the motion picture. On the other hand, *Spy Kids* garnered the support of McDonald's. The motion picture was promoted in each of their locations throughout the country. It was the first time that McDonald's had ever supported a U.S. Latino film.

Most of the independent U.S. Latino films again did not perform well at the box office. The same lingering problem that has plagued U.S. Latino films throughout this period is the lack of (P & A) budgets for these independents. Many of these films only received limited distribution. Consequently, only two of these motion pictures earned over $2 million. The studio U.S. Latino films of this time also did not perform well. Warner Bros. had a great deal of confidence in *Selena*. However, the film never crossed over to mainstream audiences. For some reason, young girls outside the Latino community did not flock to go watch this motion picture. *Selena* was somewhat of a box office disappointment, even though it made over $35 million. The studio-affiliated distributors like Dimension had the most success with U.S. Latino films. This distributor set up lucrative deals with McDonald's and a variety of other companies for *Spy Kids*. The film received a great deal of free publicity. In addition, the film was able to effectively avoid the Latino label despite the fact the entire cast is almost entirely Latino. *Spy Kids* illustrated how far U.S. Latino films had come since the early 1980s. At the same time, *Spy Kids* describes the wide disparity of themes that is being produced by the U.S. Latino filmmaking community.

The late 1990s to 2001 was again a period that encompassed a diverse number of themes that revolved around numerous Latino characters. While most of these motion pictures still centered on characters from Mexican descent, a growing number of these

motion pictures were about Puerto Rican characters. The inclusion of more Puerto Rican characters in U.S. Latino films is an indication that Puerto Rican representation is improving. However, Puerto Ricans filmmakers did not direct many of these films that centered on Puerto Rican or Nuyorican stories. The lack of Puerto Rican filmmakers and the lack of a voice is a problem that Lillian Jimenez bemoans throughout her article and that still has not changed much from behind the camera with the exception of Miguel Arteta. As for Chicano films, I believe these motion pictures are in interesting place, because a growing number of these Mexican-American directors do not like to be affiliated with the early Chicano movement or with these older directors. In addition, a growing number of these motion pictures about Mexican-Americans are also being directed by non-Mexican-Americans. As a matter of fact, the number of films that combine a predominantly Mexican-American cast and a Mexican-American director have become quite rare.

2002-2003

The studios continued to not be open to many niche market films. However, Universal developed an interesting alliance with an emerging Latino marketing company called Arenas Entertainment. They had a profitable venture with their initial film. Although this partnership did not profoundly change the structure of motion picture industry, this was a significant event for the Latino filmmaking community. A Latino company rarely had this type of access to a Hollywood studio distributor. In other areas of the film structure, it appears that more studio-affiliated divisions are beginning to acquire more of these U.S. Latino motion pictures. Unlike previous eras, when numerous independent U.S. Latino films were being promoted and distributed on the margins of

this structure by small distributors, studio-affiliated companies appear to be taking the forefront in circulating U.S. Latino films.

The majority of these films have employed a dual marketing campaign that targeted English and Spanish-speaking Latinos and art film audiences. While employing these campaigns, some of these motion pictures have attempted to circumvent the Latino label in their general market plans in order to avoid being pigeonholed. Simultaneously, they appear to highlight the Latino elements when they have developed their Latino campaigns. These dual marketing campaigns seem like they have enabled many of these studio affiliated or studio U.S. Latino films to either debut in many theaters or slowly reach at least 150 theaters nationwide by building a word of mouth. One of the byproducts of this collaboration is that U.S. Latino films now have more access to screens.

Along with better distribution, U.S. Latino films produced higher box office figures than in previous periods. Almost all of these films more than doubled their production costs. These box office figures suggest that these films at least broke even during their theatrical run. Thus, the studio almost certainly assured themselves a profit in each of these film's ancillary runs. The studio-affiliated distributors of this era appear to be better suited to effectively promote and circulate these motion pictures.

For the past two decades U.S. Latino films have undergone tremendous changes. Throughout the 1980s, many of these films originated from the Mexican-American community. Over time, feature films that center on U.S. Latino characters has grown and now include other subgroups like Cubans and Puerto Ricans. Simultaneously, an increasing number of these films throughout the 1990s began to be directed by non-

Latinos. The types of motion pictures that have emerged about this ethnic group in the 1990s and into the 21st century have tended to be as diverse as the U.S. Latino community. Therefore, I believe that the dominant form of filmmaking that Trevino mentions never really emerged except for a brief time in the late 1980s when Hollywood studios distributed many of these films. After the era of studio distribution, these filmmakers and other non-Latino filmmakers have produced a wide variety of motion pictures, which cannot be easily categorized as U.S. Latino films. I believe that Latino filmmakers will continue to push the boundaries on what constitutes a U.S. Latino film, since they develop, produce, and often distribute these motion pictures on the margins of the motion picture structure.

Limitations of the study

The primary limitations of this study was my over reliance on industry-oriented publications like *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter*. While the publications were extremely helpful and do provide some insight to what is occurring within the Hollywood structure, these publications are limited to what Hollywood companies want to tell them. Studios on occasion withhold accurate information or spin information that may put them in a negative light. Consequently, the information these publications disseminate is often limited in its perspective. Ideally, I would have preferred to have had a broader array of industry oriented material to rely on to double check the accuracy of the information that was being published in *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter*.

Another limitation of the study was the lack of primary information that I had access to. Studios do not make this information accessible to many people. They are very secretive about this facet of the business. They simply do not allow scholars access

to this material. In many cases, they did not mind if I had access to their archive. However, they did not know where this information was stored, because many of the films within this study are old. They had no idea if these files were stored in huge archives or if they even existed. The constant changes in management within the studio also made locating files from previous supervisors or organizations extremely difficult.

In terms of studying independent films, again, I was limited by the lack of primary information. Many of the companies that I wanted to study were no longer in the film business. Many of these companies had long since closed their doors. Consequently, trying to locate individuals who were affiliated with these distributors was often an act of futility. Many of these marketing or distribution people had move on and were doing something completely different in their lives. As a result, much of my information on certain independent U.S. Latinos films is quite thin.

I was also too dependent on personal interviews for my information. Many of these people did not have a great deal of time to talk to me. They were busy people. In addition, they often had to rely on their personal memories, which sometimes may be inaccurate. At times, I was asked to omit information or they asked me to keep things off the record. Other vital people like Edward James Olmos, Luis Valdez, and Gregory Nava just simply did not have time to talk to me. Again a wider array of people who could have sat down and talked to me would have added a lot more valuable texture and nuances to this study.

Future recommendations for research

U.S. Latinos are simply understudied and under researched in all academic fields. I believe my research was just a preliminary study about how U.S. Latino films were

promoted in the New Hollywood structure. I hope that researcher in the future will take this study and broadened its scope to include more case studies that I did not complete. The dearth of knowledge about this facet of the business is so widespread that simply interviewing more marketers, publicists, and producers would significantly increase the amount of information that is accessible to academics as well as the general public.

In terms of other possible studies that center on U.S. Latino film marketing, a researcher could focus on the promotion of independent U.S. Latino films. This investigator can center his study on the effectiveness of a grassroots marketing campaign. The researcher can compare and contrast the effectiveness of these local strategies and attempt to discover what time of grassroots plans work well with this community. At the same time, an investigator can discover what types of strategies were not effective. Lastly, the researcher can discover whether English, Spanish, or bilingual publicity material was more effective in attracting this audience.

Another potential study could be an investigation on the promotion of Latin American and Spanish films from *Like Water for Chocolate* to the present date. The study could compare and contrast different eras in more detail. Conversely, a researcher could appraise the promotion of U.S. Latino films with other niche market films like Black or Asian films An additional area of possible research could focus on comparing various grassroots marketing campaigns and testing its effectiveness with different mass media campaigns. The scholar could develop exit polls at certain locations and discover what motivated these moviegoers to attend the screening. Perhaps, this would be an effective plan in determining what type of media to use when promoting these films.

The last area of research that needs to be analyzed is the ancillary markets like home video and DVD sales. A researcher could study how U.S. Latino films performed in these growing and under research areas of the business. This study could answer what types and why these U.S. Latino films performed well during their video run. Another possible option could be to compare and contrast the video rental and sales with other similar niche market product or with films that had similar budgets. A study on ancillary markets could also focus on the buying and renting habits of U.S. Latinos, which would be extremely useful for Hollywood studios, studio-affiliated, or independent distributors that have a significant film library.

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Vita

Henry Puente was born in Oxnard, California on December 29, 1967, the son of Rosa Ruelas Puente and Henry Olguin Puente. After receiving his diploma in 1986 from Gladstone High School in Covina, California, he enrolled for one semester at Mount San Antonio College in Walnut, California in the fall of 1986 and Citrus College in Glendora, California in the spring of 1987. He transferred Chaffey College in Rancho Cucamonga, California in the winter of 1988. He received his Associate of Arts Degree from Chaffey in May 1990. After enrolling in summer school courses in 1990 at Cal Poly Pomona in Pomona, California, he entered Cal State Fullerton in the fall of 1990. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Cal State Fullerton in May 1992. After being employed for several years, he entered graduate school at the University of Southern California's (USC) Annenberg School of Communication in the fall of 1995. He earned a Master of Arts degree from USC in the winter of 1996. In the fall of 1999, he entered the Radio/Television/Film's doctoral program at the University of Texas at Austin. He currently is the Director of Sales for Arenas Entertainment in Beverly Hills, California.

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